



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

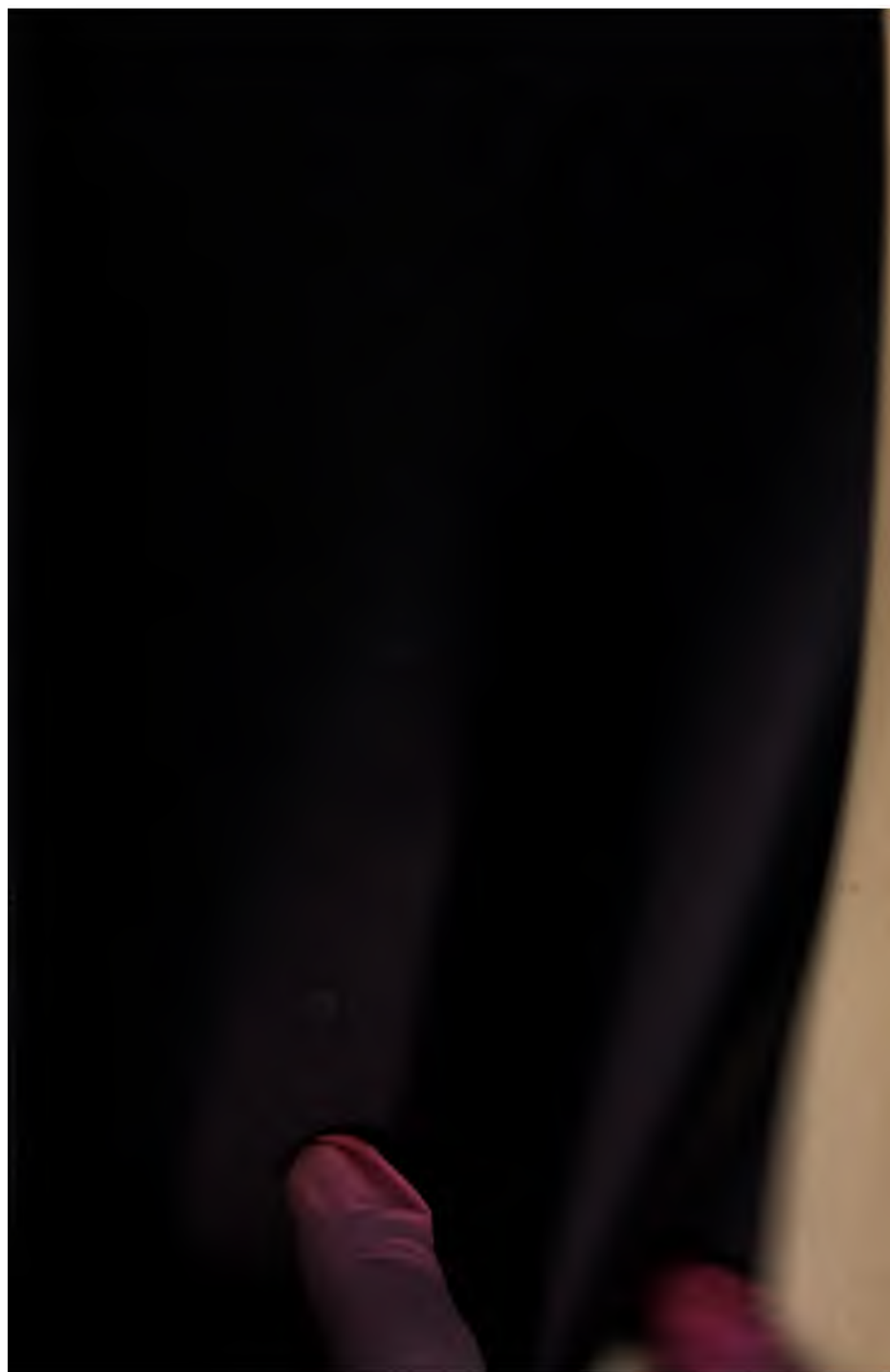
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



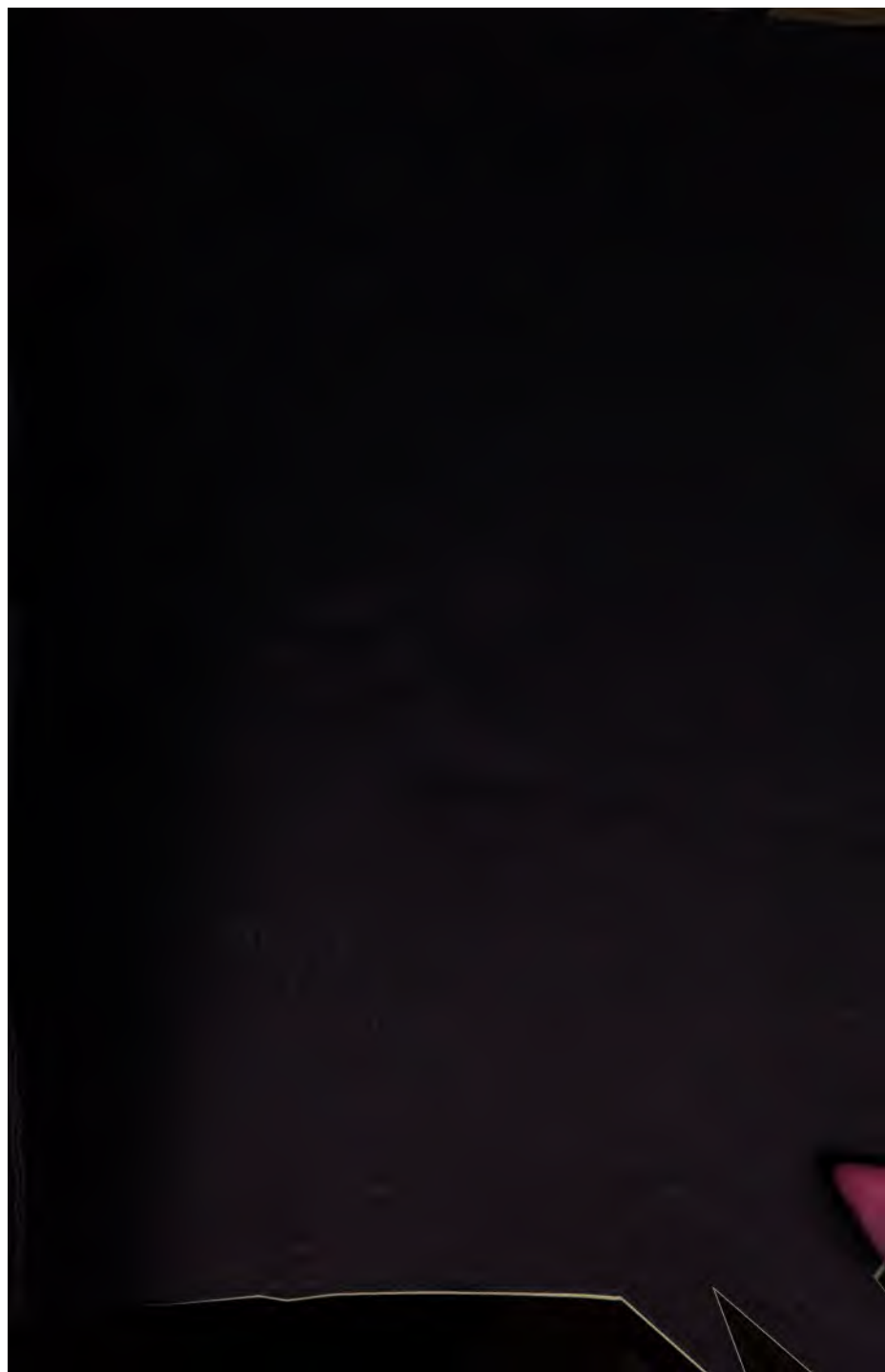
600060596W





EARL'S DENE





EARL'S DENE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE

E A R L ' S D E N E

BY

R. E. FRANCILLON



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

MDCCCLXX

250. 17 163

BOOK III.

CHAPTER IV.

IN some important respects, therefore, Marie was better off than Félix with regard to the relations in which they stood towards one another, and in others, no less important, worse. But in no respect was she better off than he than in this, that every day she had her daily work upon which to fall back and to expend a great part of the thoughts and feelings that would otherwise have necessarily run to disease. He might also, of course, in a similar manner, have thrown himself into work after the heroic manner prescribed as a remedy for all mental and moral diseases under the sun by the prophets of these latter days: but this is what experience, regardless of prophets and doctors, tells us not even the strongest man ever does unless he finds the hard work ready

made to his hands, and unless it is peremptory. It is that the man who has absorbing and peremptory work to do is fortunate: it is not that the man who, when disturbed in heart or mind, cannot make work for himself, is weak. Félix had a very little to do in a very poor way—enough in quantity to keep him afloat upon the sea of poverty—but it was not of a kind to interest him. The man who starts with an ambition to rival some Moretti, and who cannot bring himself, in spite of circumstances, to treat a sublime art as a mere bread-making profession, cannot be supposed to take kindly to spending his evenings in helping a number of professed swine-feeders to provide the animals who looked to them for a provision of tune and time, with the popular compositions which he and his companions in the old Latin days had been used irreverently to term "*Larure*." Among many of his companions this way of talking had of course been nothing but student cant: and when their student days were over, they had taken very kindly to the purveying of this said *larure* to the creatures that turn up their snouts at pearls. But Félix had been thoroughly in earnest: and, without being a racer of the highest form, he was still able to scorn himself for being forced to apply himself to the cart-horse work to which he

seemed now and henceforth to be doomed. Besides, where a man has been nourished through the channel of the imagination all his days, he finds it impossible, whatever people may say, to find consolation in work for its own sake, simply because it is work, when it is utterly uncongenial to himself. A certain amount of insuperable fastidiousness is the penalty that a man must pay for the privilege of being allowed to see visions and to dream dreams. It is true that he might have found congenial occupation in endeavouring to express himself by composition, and so have let out, in the best and most healthy way, much that was turning sour within him: but the artist, at all events, will understand why this was now impossible for him. It is not under the influence of immediate external excitement that men compose: it is a sign of reaction, a proof that the excitement itself is over, when they sit down to express it in words, or colours, or chords. Marie, on the other hand, had never had to seek her food through the imagination: during the period of life when one becomes what one must essentially remain, she had had to draw her nourishment from practical life in the midst of commonplace and terribly realistic surroundings, so that work, simply as work, had with her become a habit, and she would

have put her whole soul, or at all events her whole energy, into it whether it had been congenial to her or not. And then, most unlike Félix in this, she had to work for others—if not for her husband, at all events for the children: while he had none to think of or care for but himself alone—a person of whom he still thought a great deal, but for whom he was beginning to care very little. Besides, her task was not to express her own feelings and thoughts, and she was very probably incapable of doing so had she tried—hers was but to express the ideas of others: and to do this well and adequately there is nothing equal to moral excitement—unless it be champagne.

But, better off on the whole as she undoubtedly was, this was, after all, but burning the candle at both ends: and at every pause in her daily occupations, and whenever she had to rest for a while, she became subject to violent reactions—so violent as to affect her physically. There is a kind of moral delirium which, in some of its worst effects, and even in some of its symptoms, closely resembles the delirium of drink itself, and which, equally with the latter, makes the patient conversant with what is meant by *nerves*—a visitation from which Marie's hitherto healthy nature had till now kept her free.

Now this kind of extreme nervous excitement would be an invaluable aid to an artist if a continuance of it did not necessarily end in killing him or driving him mad : and it would make any man capable of attempting if not of doing great things, if it did not distort his judgment—if it did not render him almost incapable of recognising and appreciating facts so as to distinguish between the real and the unreal—if it did not lead him to act upon reason when it would be wiser to follow impulse, and on impulse when impulse is peculiarly fatal or absurd.

It was under the influence of one of these seasons of reaction with which she was now so often visited, especially when, as was now the case, she had been performing the preceding evening with even greater success than usual, that she was found by Angélique within a day or two of Hugh's arrest.

The contrast between the two cousins was now greater than ever, but certainly not in the same way as of old. There are not a few persons who would now have been tempted to say, on seeing them for the first time, that Marie was even the more beautiful of the two.

The essential part of beauty is of so subtle a character, and depends upon such apparent trifles, that it may well happen that the loss or even variation

of a single unappreciable light or shadow upon the most beautiful of faces may cause nothing short of an absolute and total loss of beauty, while a like variation in a different direction may change a plain face into one that is positively beautiful. Now so much as this had not been brought about as yet in the present instance, for the features of Angélique were far too perfect in themselves, to lose for a long time to come the charm that results from the perfection of sculpture even if they lost every other charm, and loss or want of natural colour and tone may always be artificially supplied with a very fair amount of success. Angélique had never, even in her best days, entertained a Quakerish horror of the use of the hare's foot, and now she was beginning to find in it a faithful, if not an honest, friend. But there is, after all, one matter in which the virtue of honesty of life and purpose—not only in respect of pearl-powder and rouge—does, for a wonder, obtain something more than itself for its reward. What that matter is, there is no need to say: it belongs to an experience so old and so wide as to have obtained the sanction of even the proverb-mongers, who, for the most part, seem to scorn to tell the world anything that all the world has not known for five thousand eight hundred and

seventy-four years at the very least. In the attempt which was made to describe Angélique Lefort in the fifth chapter of the first book of this story, mention was made of a certain want of that harmony about her which is in itself the cause of beauty when beauty is otherwise wanting. Now this negative want of harmony had almost deepened into positive discord. The change is too subtle to be expressed easily, but is not difficult to be rendered intelligible. That small, almost too small mouth, had surely never been intended by nature to become so drawn in its lines as to appear smaller still, nor were the large languid eyes meant to express the quick and peculiar energy that was now becoming habitual to them, and that uncomfortably contradicted the increased listlessness of her figure and carriage. These are the most appreciable instances only: but they were enough to show that the spots upon the sun were not unlikely to prove an eclipse in time. And yet it was not that her style of beauty had lost any of its spirituality: on the contrary, in this respect it had gained—only in a wrong and not very pleasant direction. Marie, however, though she did not by any means see her cousin from day to day, was blind to every change: she still believed in her heroine's irresistible beauty as much as in all her

heroine's thousand other perfections : and so, it seemed, would she to the end. She, unlike Félix once more, could not cease to believe until belief should be positively slain altogether. She believed in her husband still, and she believed in her cousin, *sicut erat in principio* : and, to all appearance, in spite of the efforts of one of them at least to render her an infidel, *et semper et in sæcula sæculorum*.

The cousins embraced tenderly as usual. It was some little time since they had last met : and though Marie perceived no change in Angélique, the latter, with her sharper and less believing eyes, saw a very considerable alteration in Marie—a change, moreover, which she was unable to understand. Nor did she take any pains to speculate about its signification, seeing that she had really important business in hand.

“ Marie, *mon ange*, you are not looking yourself. What is the matter? Have you a headache?”

It was days since Marie had heard a word of kindness spoken to her : and though her cousin's voice never at any time had the ring of true sympathy in it, still the voice was Angélique's, and the words were kind. To the surprise of the latter, she did what she had scarcely been known to do in her life before—she threw herself into her arms, and burst into a flood of tears.

It may be remembered that if there was anything or any person save her own beautiful self for whom Angélique cared it was Marie: and to see her overcome in so unprecedented and apparently so causeless a way, distressed her in reality and honestly. She knew how hard Marie had been working of late, and how unused she was to excitement, and feared she was going to be ill. So, for a little while she petted her, and let her have her cry out.

"And now, my darling, what is it?"

Marie, having thus given way, was now heartily ashamed of herself with all the shame of a reserved nature that cannot bear to uncover its nakedness even before its own eyes.

"Oh, I am dreadfully silly—that is all: I was up late last night, and it was so hot, and I got a headache I suppose—and I'm not used to headaches, you know. There—I'm better now, and won't do it again, I promise. I am so glad to see you again. Have you any good news? Has Hugh found anything to do?"

"Marie, dearest, I am in the greatest distress you can conceive. Things have come to the worst at last, I really do think. And how they're to end, heaven knows!" Her style of dress did not give the idea of very deep pecuniary distress, at all events—but

that was her own affair. "I'm sure I don't," she continued. "No—Hugh has found nothing, and isn't likely to now, unless that old cat will come round."

"What? He is not ill?"

"Oh no—worse than that."

"Oh, Angélique! Worse than ill?"

"Well, of course I don't mean that——"

"What is it, then?"

"Why, I scarcely like to say, even to you. You see we have been *obliged* to run into debt: we couldn't keep on robbing you for ever——"

"Angélique!"

"Of course not: and so I suppose we went a little too far. Anyhow, Hugh has been arrested for what we owe."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Marie, starting up suddenly and forgetting herself and her own less tangible troubles at once. The word "arrested" did not mean to her an ordinary accident to which all men were more or less liable, as they were in those days to taking the small-pox or fighting a duel: to her it conveyed the idea of constables, cells, chains, judges in scarlet and ermine, and transportation at least for the *dénouement*. Such was her own agitation at the ideas conjured up before her mind's eye by that in

itself extremely innocent word, that she did not notice how calmly so serious a matter was taken by her whom it most concerned.

The latter, not comprehending Marie's nervous condition, could scarcely help smiling, so much more conversant was she with the ways of the world.

"And so what in the world we are to do now, I cannot imagine," she went on quietly. "The sum is not very large, it is true: but when one has nothing at all, it doesn't matter whether one owes much or little—I am not sure it is not better to owe much, on the whole. And if Hugh couldn't pay before, poor fellow, how do they think he can pay now that he is shut up?"

"How much is it?" asked Marie, eagerly.

Now it must not be supposed for a moment that Angélique, having played so good a card as that which consisted in getting her husband caged, was going to lose the advantage of such an appeal to Miss Clare, by getting him let out again. If she was to be in debt, she might as well turn her debts into trump cards, and not throw them away, and the benefits that they were likely to bring, for such a trifle as Marie might be able to spare her. Nor had she foreseen that the first thought of her cousin would have been how Hugh might be restored to

freedom. It would certainly not have been her own first thought under similar circumstances, inasmuch as she had by this time learned the value of money: and so it did not occur to her that it would have been that of any one else. But still, under the influence of the new light that Marie's last eager question had given her with regard to the extent to which impulsive generosity might go, she considered for a moment before she answered,—

“Oh, it is not a very large sum—at least Miss Clare or Miss Raymond would not call it so. It is only large to paupers like us. It is not more than fifty pounds or so.”

Marie's face fell. To a woman whose financial operations consist in dealings with shillings, and who has no debts to owe, fifty pounds all at once without having the means and ability to pay them, seems something very dreadful indeed. And in point of fact, fifty pounds was a sum that she herself could very ill afford to spare immediately. One may be in the enjoyment of a great deal of fame, and be getting on in more substantial respects very well and very securely, and yet not be in constant possession of a balance to the good of even so much as the sum of which Angélique had spoken so slightly.

"Fifty pounds!" she said. "And will paying that get him out of——"

"Yes—I should think so. Of course there is what are called costs, and things. But I have no doubt that would do, if one only knew where to get it."

"Prosper owes me some money," replied Marie, hesitatingly, "and he has sometimes made me advances. Perhaps——"

"But, my darling, I could not think——"

"But surely—when Hugh is in prison! We will go and see Prosper at once——"

"No: that would hardly do. My husband's misfortune——"

"But we need not tell him what it is for."

"In that case—but are you sure you can spare it?"

"My dear Angélique! what a question!"

"Well, you are *mon ange* indeed. What can I say to you? By the way, have you seen anything of your old friend Mark Warden lately?"

Marie flushed, and then grew pale, as though her ears had suddenly caught the name of a lover: and for the same reason. For her mind was confused with regard to her feelings towards him, and to his towards her.

"No—not for some time."

"Ah, I suppose he will forget us all now. What luck some people have! And yet he had no better chances than others."

"Forget us! Why? What has happened?"

"Why, Marie, you look quite frightened! One would think you were back in the days of the old flirtation at Denethorp. But you are not, are you? Well, you have both had better fortune apart, I must say, than if you had come together, as we used to joke about. My angel has become a great artist: and he, who was never fit to look at her—as if any man in the world was fit to look at her!——"

"Well?"

"It certainly is a piece of news. It will astonish Denethorp with a vengeance, and quite throw into the shade my own little escapade. He is going to be master of New Court—there!"

Nothing could have been more bitter than the tone in which she, as it were, threw these words at Marie. But the latter could not be expected to understand them. She could only repeat her cousin's bitter words in the form of a blank question.

"Going to be master of New Court?"

"You may well ask like that! Yes: old Dr Warden's son, Lorry's brother, the grandson of a country shopkeeper, is going to marry Miss Ray-

mond of New Court. Well, we women are strange creatures!"

Well indeed might Marie, being what she was, and knowing what she knew, be taken aback by such news. Had her last conversation with Warden never taken place, she would have treated such a report as false on the face of it. But, with that conversation still fresh in her recollection, the very suggestion of such a report, unproved as it was, and false as it must almost of necessity be, was at all events sufficient to open eyes that were even as blind as hers were. And it did open them—or rather tore them open, for they insisted on keeping themselves closed even still: so much is constancy difficult to convince of inconstancy. Yes: in spite of Félix, in spite of all things, she was constant still, though the constancy had but little to do with the source from which constancy should spring. No one can rule his heart in such matters: but women like Marie can refuse to be ruled by it—and that is constancy of a nobler sort than mere incapability of changing. The latter is, after all, but the constancy of the needle to the pole, which remains unvarying and unvariable, because it is involuntary: the former is that of the martyr to his faith, who remains true to it because of his will.

She spoke, however, very calmly and quietly—much more like her old self than had of late been the case—as she replied,—

“That cannot be, Angélique.”

“Perhaps not: but it is true, all the same.”

“Who told you?”

“Did you ever hear of a great friend of Mark Warden’s called Barton?”

“I have heard of him.”

“He is with Hugh now where they are keeping him at a place near Holborn—so you see I have the story on the best authority. And if I had it on worse I should believe it, for I have guessed as much all along.”

There was so little confidence between the husband and wife, that for aught Marie knew, Barton might be the most intimate friend that Mark had in the world. But she made no farther answer, for her heart gave a leap at the sound of a knock at the door, which she recognised only too well.

CHAPTER V.

IT was the very first time that Félix had come across Angélique since her marriage: and he had of late been so much in the habit of visiting her cousin without seeing herself, that he was never prepared to meet her now, and had quite forgotten that the frequency of his visits had originated in his desire to see her and not Marie.

The situation was therefore more than sufficiently embarrassing for a man who like him had never graduated in the school of society that teaches its scholars never to find any situation in the world difficult, from the extrication of an army from an enemy's country, up to the extrication of one's foot from a lady's dress in a ball-room. Certainly there was no reason on earth, in the nature of things, why he should feel dissatisfied with himself. He had been the victim, she the betrayer; and he had therefore every right, if he were so minded, to claim

the dignity that is the privilege of the injured party in such matters. And so, had he been Angélique and had she been Félix, he would have both felt and acted. But being as they were—he the man and she the woman—it was he who somehow felt as though it had been he and not she who had been the one to blame. A woman who is no longer a child is always mistress of such a situation, and if she has only a very little tact may always shine in it to advantage, however much she may in reality be in the wrong: while, on the other hand, a man requires to have both experience and genius in such matters to come out of it with even as much as decent credit, however much he may be in the right. Perhaps Félix was also weighted with the feeling that, when all was said and done, he had sinned against the gospel of romance by not having been altogether so true to the memory of his old passion as he had once vowed to be: for inconstancy on the one side is not, in the creed of such as he, held to be a set-off against inconstancy on the other. On sounder grounds there was plenty of excuse for him, no doubt; but then, “*Qui s’excuse—*.”

Not that Angélique’s large eyes supported any such self-accusation by the faintest touch of upbraiding. She did change colour for one impercep-

tible moment : for there are some things which the least worldly and practical-minded of women is incapable of forgetting, or at least of remembering without some shadow of regret. The less of true romance that there is in her composition, the more apt is the voice of false sentiment to make itself heard : and of false sentiment Madame Lester at least had always had her full share—no less now that her reading consisted of little that was more sentimental than butchers' bills, than when she used to identify herself with Byronic heroines. Moreover, it did not by any means seem to follow in her eyes that because she chanced to be so unfortunate—as it had turned out—to be married, she should lose her sway over any of her adorers, even though, as in the case of Félix, she should gain from them nothing more valuable than a little adoration. And then she felt kind to him for old recollections' sake, and as a woman cannot help feeling towards one who has once loved her and whom she supposes to love her still. But still she was far from allowing any trace of her emotion to be visible : and indeed it was far too slight, such as it was, for her to be conscious of having felt any whatever. On the contrary, she at once frankly held out her hand with the air of welcoming an old friend, and said,—

"*Mais*, Monsieur Créville, you come in time to convince this doubter. Is it not true that Miss Raymond is to be married?"

"What! my old pupil? I had not heard it."

Her manner had at once put him at his ease, so far as she was concerned: and so it could not be that his preoccupied air had been caused by embarrassment alone. Angélique noticed his worn appearance: and, taking it as a compliment to herself, felt more kindly towards him still.

"And you do not ask to whom? But I forgot—you would not know him. We provincials forget that there are people in the world to whom our little celebrities are unknown. And yet, you might know him, though—you are a friend of Mr Barton?"

"Of Barton?"

"Yes—and so is he."

"I should scarcely have thought that any friend of Barton would have fallen in Miss Raymond's way."

"Oh, I don't know. Marriages are made in heaven, they say. Mark Warden is the favoured mortal. Do you know him?"

For what purpose Félix, full of involuntary suspicion of Marie as he was, had still once more come

to see her, is not difficult to guess, so long as moths will insist upon flying into the flame in spite of the warning that ought to be taken by them from the fate of millions of ancestral generations. It may, however, be assumed that, as he himself supposed, he had come to bid adieu to the last of his illusions before he cast the dust of England from his feet for ever.

Now Angélique had been able to take great credit to herself for her passing gleam of sentiment. She was proud of it, and of herself for having been capable of feeling it. But Félix, except for the feeling of embarrassment when he first perceived her, and of which he now felt almost ashamed, had felt not even a passing gleam. No sooner had he met her eyes, no sooner had she spoken, than it was plain to him that the Angélique whom he now saw before him was the Angélique of his *grande passion* no more: if, indeed, the Angélique of his *grande passion* had ever really existed in the flesh. In that moment he felt that something else besides his own heart had changed: or rather, that his heart had been false to her because it had never ceased to be true to the ideal that he had sought in her and had found—where?

Where indeed? It was clear enough even to him,

in the light of the flood of joy that rushed into his heart when he heard the last words of Angélique, and looked up suddenly at Marie. His doubts of her had then, after all, been as absurd as he had been trying vainly to persuade himself that they were, and Barton had in truth been slandering her as grossly as he had been trying, with equal ill-success, to force himself to assume. Had any sort of connection really existed between her and Warden, it was not thus and in her presence that Angélique—who must have known of it—would have spoken.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, with a sigh of something more than relief. “Do you know Barton, then? How long has he known this?”

“Not long. It is only just settled, it seems. It is a curious match, is it not?”

“Any way the bridegroom is to be congratulated. And how is Barton? I did not know you knew him.”

“No more we did, till yesterday. Is it true that he writes the dramatic criticism for the ‘Trumpet’? and that you actually allowed him to insert that odious review of poor Miss Marchmont? For shame! Ah, you cared a little more about her than that once upon a time,—did you not? What a couple of silly

children we were! But they were pleasant days, all the same—those delightful days when we were so miserable. We shall never have such pleasant ones again—no, not when you have all the world at your feet, and when I—well, I shall have dropped out of your life then, *n'est ce pas*, Monsieur? Marie, my angel, now I must go and carry the news of your generosity to poor Hugh. *Au revoir, donc, mon ange—et vous, Monsieur, s'il vous plait*—and then we will talk about the old times once more—and you will not laugh at me if I for my part cannot quite laugh at them, will you?"

And so, with a parting embrace to her angel, and another presentation of her hand to the lover for whose death she had just been so nearly answerable, she once more carried into the street her last purchase from Madame Jupon.

But although Félix had received an unmistakable lesson from the unspeakably joyful relief that the words of Angélique had given him, he was certainly no nearer reading what was in the heart of Marie. All that he could think of now was the grand fact that she was in reality all that he had supposed her to be—that she had once more been restored to her pedestal above the altar. How could he ever have committed the treason, the blasphemy, of having

even for a single moment cast her down? Surely, it now seemed to him, he could never really have done so—he must always, in his heart of hearts, have remained loyal: the disturbance could only have been in his fancy—in his mind.

But Marie!—

Whether she still loved her husband or no, there is but one word to describe her state: and that word is Desolation. Whatever her feelings towards Félix might be, they did not subtract from the force of the word.

The state of nervous excitement, or rather exhaustion, in which she was, and in which the activity of the memory and of the imagination fully made up for the loss of calm reason, caused her to comprehend at once and to the letter every word that had passed between Mark Warden and herself in the course of her last interview with him, and that had then been so unintelligible. So plain had the meaning of it grown now, that the amount of truth that might lie in the report which she had just heard was altogether immaterial. Whatever might be the explanation of that report, there remained to stare her in the face, not, perhaps, the fact that he was actually about to leave her for another—that must be as she willed, to say the least of it—but certainly the fact

that he wished to do so, and that he had actually proposed it to her almost in so many words. At present, though she realised this, she was incapable of realising how it affected her. It is weaker women than she whose feelings in such matters are sufficiently simple to find at once a way into action, whether by the road of anger or by that of tears. Besides, the mind of Marie was always a little slow to bring itself into action whenever it was necessary to blame others, or even to think them in the wrong, while her eyes were not apt to weep for her own sorrows. So, for the present, she was simply turned to stone, and the last words of Angélique had fallen upon deaf ears.

Felix.—"So my first pupil is to be married! How old it makes one feel! And the bridegroom—is he the Mr Warden whom I once met here, and to whom you introduced me?"

Marie (starting from her stupor, and suddenly).—"I beg your pardon——"

Felix.—"Are you not well, dear Marie?"

Marie (dreamily).—"Oh, I am quite well—only a little tired, I suppose. I am not used to late hours yet, you see."

Felix.—"And your head aches, does it not?"

Marie.—"A little—but it is nothing."

Felix.—"And I am boring you to death, I suppose?"

Marie.—"Oh, no: why should you be?"

Felix.—"I am sure I must be, though. And I really came for no purpose in the world—so——"

Marie.—"Oh, you need not hurry to go: and yet—yes, I really am quite well: I am only very stupid, as usual. There,"—drawing herself up with an effort, but with a smile—"‘*Io son Guglielmo Tell!*’—What was it you asked me just now and that I was rude enough not to answer?"

Felix.—"Oh, only about my old pupil's *futur*."

Marie (bravely).—"Mr Warden. You met him once here. They will make an admirable match, though Angélique does not seem to think so. She has a great fortune, and is good enough for any body, and so amiable!—and he has great talent and great ambition, and will make her the wife of a great man, as she deserves."

Felix (coldly).—"Indeed!"

Marie.—"Yes. He only wanted the means, and now he will have them."

Felix.—"You seem to have great faith in him."

Marie.—"I go by what I hear—nothing more."

Felix.—"But you know him?"

Marie.—"What can girls like me know about the

lives and careers of men? We see them as they condescend to show themselves to us—the outside: but as they are to each other and to themselves—never.”

Félix.—“Never?”

Marie.—“Or when we do see them as they are, it is only to find out that we stand in their way.”

Félix (unable to help observing the scarcely perceptible tinge of bitterness in her tone, and the involuntary comparison that she had suggested between herself and Miss Raymond).—“And you think, then, that Miss Raymond will not stand in the way of this friend of yours?”

Marie (alarmed for her husband's secret, and exaggeratedly alarmed about what her words, which she had forgotten, might have led Félix to suspect).—“I hope not. I wish him well, like all my friends. But have you no news of yourself?”

Félix.—“I? Not a word. I never have. I manage to keep body and soul together—or at least the body without the soul—which can scarcely be called news. That is about all—and the process is not very interesting to lookers-on.”

Marie.—“But it is interesting to me, *mon ami*. I can read the stars, and like to watch how my prophecies come true.”

Félix.—"I am afraid that is not a very profitable knowledge. I thought I could once, myself: but it was only to find them as ambiguous as earthly oracles, and even more treacherous."

Marie.—"I want you to promise me something. Will you?"

Félix.—"If it is to do anything for you. I owe you so much, and have never done anything for you yet."

Marie.—"Yes, it is for me, if that is any satisfaction to you. But it is not because it is for me that you must do it."

Félix.—"Why not? I am sick of trying to do things for myself—and you, I think—I hope—are the only person likely to care about what I do."

Marie.—"Will you promise? I am speaking seriously."

Félix.—"Of course I promise."

Marie.—"Félix, my friend, I cannot help seeing that for some reason or other you are bent upon making a wreck of your whole life. Yes—it is perfectly true. You have plenty of talent: and I have not known you all this long time so well not to know that you might easily in due time take the position that, as you have often told me, you were once ambitious of taking. Besides, is it not due to

Prosper, to your old benefactors, to Moretti himself, to justify them in the interest they have taken in you, and the sacrifices they have made for you?—I may speak plainly to you, I hope?"

Félix.—"Always."

Marie.—"Do you remember telling me of your childhood, and of your first insight into the existence of an art-world outside and above the mere world of nature into which you had been born? Ah, you were fortunate, more fortunate than you can tell, in waking to it so early! Art was thus able to become to you a second nature: it did not come to you, as it came to me, too late for me to find in it another and nobler world. Do not throw away this good fortune of yours, which comes to so few! Would you throw away your art, your power of doing something for it and for the world, your duty, your true soul, the life that nature and art and God have given you, for the sake of the shadow of a memory? No, my friend—leave such weakness to women: but let me believe that there is at all events one true man in the world."

Félix.—"Marie!"

Marie.—"Oh, I know what you mean—I do not mean true to a woman. That is something—but I do not mean that now. And truth to a woman is

worth nothing when it prevents a man from being true to himself: and you are not being true to yourself, if you can forgive me for saying so. Romance is an ornament of life—the gilding to hide its hardness, its coldness, its grossness, its littleness, if you will: but it is not true gold, and one must take life as it is, after all, and not as we would have it seem. We are not in the world to make love and make each other—well, miserable: for that must be the end of all falsehood.”

Felix.—“But there is such a thing as love that is not falsehood and not misery. I understand what you mean: but I have learned a great deal lately. Marie, you are only too right in one thing. I have indeed been weak, blind, ungrateful, false to myself and to all that is good and true even more than you think: but I will be so no longer. I promise you with all my heart that, with your help, with your sympathy, I will go forward in the right path so far as I may. I may never be a great artist—Prosper is right: the great artist must be something more than man, and must use emotions, not suffer or enjoy them. But to be a man is better than to be an artist—and that, if you will help me, I will be.”

Marie.—“Man and artist too. I do not ask you to lose your sympathy with the world and exchange

your heart for a musical machine—God forbid! But art is work: and it is work worth a man's doing, without respect to what he may enjoy or suffer by it."

Felix.—"But——"

Marie.—"Ah, it is a grand thing to be a man and not a woman! No wonder we women despise a weak man—for no man need ever be weak. We are wrong perhaps in thinking so, for the battle of the world is no doubt harder than we think for, who know it not in all its strength. But we are right in thinking that combat should give strength, not destroy it."

Felix.—"Marie—can it be that you too have suffered that you speak thus?"

Marie.—"I!"

Felix.—"Forgive me——"

Marie.—"My friend—who has not suffered? who does not suffer? Yes—I do suffer when I see you still a slave to a woman, whoever she may be. Shall I tell you something? Well, then, learn from a woman that no woman is worth the loss of a man's whole life—no, nor even of a part of it. Is it not true that every man has a career into which no woman may enter? Is she not a hindrance and a stumbling-block to him in his true life? Is he ever

capable of entering into the little trivial matters that make up hers? Is not the kindest thing she can do for him to leave him free? Oh, my friend, be warned: recognise your career, for you have one: do not be a slave to a fancy, for it is nothing more. I know you can be strong, if you only will. Do you know what I would do were I a man? I would pray God every day to save me from women's love—not only for my own sake, but—for theirs."

Félix.—"No, Marie—I am no slave to a woman. Those chains are broken for ever—if indeed they were ever whole. And you are wrong—wrong a thousand times. There *are* women in the world who are worth the loss of any man's life—for they supply him with a nobler and a better. There are women who are not only no hindrance but an aid and a motive to the noblest career. Yes, and there are men who can appreciate the perfection of sympathy even in the smallest things. Where—how—can you have learned so bitter a creed as yours?"

Marie.—"Ah, if I could but think so!"

Félix.—"You do not know what love means, you who have never loved."

Marie.—"And you?"

Félix.—"I have found out what it means. I am wiser than you."

Marie.—"Then——"

Félix (warmly).—"Do not be afraid—such love as mine is of that kind which you deny. 'If I could but think so,' you say—you, the truest-hearted of all women! What is sympathy but that very kind of love in which you do not believe?"

Marie.—"I do not think so. And now give me your promise. I am right—I know more than you do, after all. But I do believe in sympathy: and if any feeling on your part that there is one who sympathises with you so far as a woman may can help you to keep that promise, that feeling may be yours."

Félix.—"Oh, Marie—if this is so, then I can keep it indeed! For your sake I will strive to be all things. Will you indeed help me?"

The conversation up to this point had been almost studiously calm in its tone, as of two persons who had suffered and experienced, and were now discussing in abstract fashion the ways of the world rather than their own needs. But the barrier had been growing less substantial every moment, until, to Félix at least, it had passed away altogether, and left, as he thought, the soul of Marie as unveiled before his eyes as he felt that his must needs be before hers. He approached her more closely, and went on with increasing energy,—

"I am not inconstant. It is now that I prove my constancy to what I have loved always—to the truth and to the divine ideal for whose sake I have been chasing shadows till now. It is the shadows that have passed away and left the true light, which there is no mistaking. Marie, you blaspheme yourself when you say what you said just now. If I have lost my life, do you restore it: and I swear to you, even for your own sake, that you shall not restore it to me in vain. You are already great, I know, and I am less than nothing: but you are free, thank God! and if you will give me hope, you shall see how worthy of you I shall, I must, become. Dearest Marie! I will live for you, who represent to me all that is true and beautiful: and life for you must needs be such as you would have me live. You know me too well, Marie, for you not to understand me. Have we not been, are we not, friends? And I will make no farther claim till I have proved that I am able to be what you would have me be. But hope you must give me. That will be everything—and if it fails, one can but die at last: and meanwhile—but you will, will you not? It is for your sake—not only for my own——"

Marie (thunderstruck).—" *Mon Dieu!* "

Like the first trembling gleam of lightning that

announces at once to the fevered earth the reason of the vague and heavy restlessness that has been weighing upon its life during the sultry hours that the sun should by right have made full of energy and gladness, so, all at once, rushed through Marie the sudden consciousness of the real nature of the fever that had been wearing her for so long. The storm that had been more and more closely, day by day and hour by hour, gathering within and about her for so many weeks, had at last broken, and had torn away the mist that had hitherto hidden her even from her own eyes. The clouds, pregnant with the fulness of a first passion, had been long ripe for bursting, and had needed but a touch, a word, to set free the storm with which they were charged. And now, without a warning, that word had come. For one instant her whole soul rushed out to meet the soul which, like her own, had been so long seeking in vain for its fellow-spirit, and deluding itself, in the eagerness of search, with mocking phantasms of the reality. But the tumultuous joy of the sudden revelation which to a pure soul is nothing less than a new birth, was as evanescent as it was intense, and, like the lightning which it had resembled in its sudden brightness, left the night that it had momentarily illuminated darker than before. Hitherto

Felix.—"And I am boring you to death, I suppose?"

Marie.—"Oh, no: why should you be?"

Felix.—"I am sure I must be, though. And I really came for no purpose in the world—so——"

Marie.—"Oh, you need not hurry to go: and yet—yes, I really am quite well: I am only very stupid, as usual. There,"—drawing herself up with an effort, but with a smile—"‘*Io son Guglielmo Tell!*’—What was it you asked me just now and that I was rude enough not to answer?"

Felix.—"Oh, only about my old pupil's *futur*."

Marie (bravely).—"Mr Warden. You met him once here. They will make an admirable match, though Angélique does not seem to think so. She has a great fortune, and is good enough for any body, and so amiable!—and he has great talent and great ambition, and will make her the wife of a great man, as she deserves."

Felix (coldly).—"Indeed!"

Marie.—"Yes. He only wanted the means, and now he will have them."

Felix.—"You seem to have great faith in him."

Marie.—"I go by what I hear—nothing more."

Felix.—"But you know him?"

Marie.—"What can girls like me know about the

lives and careers of men? We see them as they condescend to show themselves to us—the outside: but as they are to each other and to themselves—never.”

Félix.—“Never?”

Marie.—“Or when we do see them as they are, it is only to find out that we stand in their way.”

Félix (unable to help observing the scarcely perceptible tinge of bitterness in her tone, and the involuntary comparison that she had suggested between herself and Miss Raymond).—“And you think, then, that Miss Raymond will not stand in the way of this friend of yours?”

Marie (alarmed for her husband's secret, and exaggeratedly alarmed about what her words, which she had forgotten, might have led Félix to suspect).—“I hope not. I wish him well, like all my friends. But have you no news of yourself?”

Félix.—“I? Not a word. I never have. I manage to keep body and soul together—or at least the body without the soul—which can scarcely be called news. That is about all—and the process is not very interesting to lookers-on.”

Marie.—“But it is interesting to me, *mon ami*. I can read the stars, and like to watch how my prophecies come true.”

Félix.—"And I am boring you to death, I suppose?"

Marie.—"Oh, no: why should you be?"

Félix.—"I am sure I must be, though. And I really came for no purpose in the world—so——"

Marie.—"Oh, you need not hurry to go: and yet—yes, I really am quite well: I am only very stupid, as usual. There,"—drawing herself up with an effort, but with a smile—"‘*Io son Guglielmo Tell!*’—What was it you asked me just now and that I was rude enough not to answer?"

Félix.—"Oh, only about my old pupil's *futur*."

Marie (bravely).—"Mr Warden. You met him once here. They will make an admirable match, though Angélique does not seem to think so. She has a great fortune, and is good enough for any body, and so amiable!—and he has great talent and great ambition, and will make her the wife of a great man, as she deserves."

Félix (coldly).—"Indeed!"

Marie.—"Yes. He only wanted the means, and now he will have them."

Félix.—"You seem to have great faith in him."

Marie.—"I go by what I hear—nothing more."

Félix.—"But you know him?"

Marie.—"What can girls like me know about the

"On one condition. Swear to me that our friendship has been a mere pastime—that sympathy is but a word—that you are careless whether I live or die——"

"Félix!"

"Yes—whether I live or die. It is nothing less. Have you not yourself taught me what life means? Swear at least that you do not love me——"

"And you will believe me?"

"You will swear it? Marie—you dare not."

"I swear to you that I can never, never be more to you than I am now—than I have been always."

"Then I am absolved from my promise. You have not sworn that you do not love me. I *do* ask you more."

All her false courage, all her pretence of strength, were swept away at last in a passion of sincerity. The lightning was followed by the storm.

"Ah, Félix, have mercy! You know not what you are doing."

"Marie, you cannot deceive me! You *do* love me, say what you will! Do I not read your heart as plainly, ten times as plainly, as you read mine? And if you love me, why are you ashamed, as though love were a sin?"

"O God, why cannot I feign—why cannot I be

strong—why must I sin? Félix—if you love me——”

“*If* I love you!”

“If you love me—leave me.”

“In God’s name, Marie, what mystery is this? Why should you wish to feign? Why should you be weak? What sin lies in loving honestly and truly? Do you not trust me? Are you afraid of your own heart?”

Afraid of her own heart! It was true, and she knew her own fear and her own weakness only too well. It was so weak that it had already yielded: it was so weak that she, with all her strength, great as it was, felt that she was unfit, unaided, to guard it for a moment more. She flung herself on her knees before him and grasped his hand in a passion of supplication.

“There!” she exclaimed. “Do you believe me now when I say Go?”

The voice and face of Félix grew stern. “Do you love me, Marie? That is the only question between us. I have a right to know. And if you love me I will not go.”

“You do not, cannot love me as I—— Do you not see how you make me humiliate myself? Ah, if you really loved me, you would understand! Do

you think it is out of caprice that I implore you to save me from my own heart——”

He stepped back suddenly, and regarded her intently. “Marie,” he began.

But he could not continue in such a tone. With equal suddenness he raised her from where she knelt and pressed her passionately to his breast. He at least had nothing to conceal, and was free to obey what his heart bade him. “Ah, I understand!” he exclaimed, joyfully. “But you love me! That is all I care to know.” The two souls had met at last.

For long she rested upon the place that by right, though not by law, was now hers without making an effort to move. But, omnipotent as the passion of a strong nature may appear, there is one citadel in every truly pure nature that it is powerless to conquer. The effort, though it came late, came at last.

She broke from him with all her strength. “Oh, for my sake, for God’s sake, go! May He pardon me—may He protect you. Félix, you must leave me—there, you know my heart now!”

“Leave you, my dearest? Yes—but to return!”

“No—never to return! Thank God for your love, Félix—if there is sin in loving, there is none in being loved! And you shall never be the worse for mine.

For I do love you, though not in the way you would have me. Do all things that are worthy of you—do them for my sake if you will, if that will aid you. Your love has made me very happy, and one day we will be friends again. Till then—adieu! I will pray for you always. And do not you forget to pray to One who can aid you more than I."

"Marie—you have some secret that you fear to tell me. Do you trust me so little as to think I would not trust you—that I would seek to know anything that it would give you pain to tell, unless that I might remove the pain? Let the past be the past to you as well as to me. What is the past to either of us now?"

"And suppose," she began, with difficulty.

"Suppose nothing—but that we love each other."

"When to love you is a sin?"

"A sin? In God's name what can you mean?"

"I *must* not tell."

"And why?"

"Félix! It is true that I have a secret—that I have been living a lie. And the secret is not my own."

"And have I no claim? Marie, I am waiting for my answer—for my sentence of life or death. I *must* know what is the barrier that stands between you and me."

What was she to do? One thing only—to sacrifice all things, at any cost, for him she loved. If that be in reality sometimes a sin, there is surely no true woman to whom it would, under any circumstances, wear a sinful guise. However she might suffer, however much he who had a legal right to her self-sacrifice might have reason to condemn her, Félix had a right to her consideration founded upon a higher law than that made by men. It is true that she hesitated for long, and that when she did speak it was from no mere impulse.

“You are right,” she said at last, suddenly. “I must not let you suffer.” And then, more slowly, and with a last effort of weakness, she added, “Now, Félix—dearest friend!—you will help to save me now, I know. Yes—I love you, Félix!—and I am a wife.”

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN we read of the grosser and less subtle forms of crime and sin in distant ages and in distant lands, they seem to us in no wise extraordinary, or even so much out of the probable course of things as to need being accounted for. But when, as they occasionally will, they make their appearance in our midst, in our own civilised country and time, we are astonished as if in sight of the impossible. We go on for the most part in so even a groove that we talk and think as though hate and envy and unscrupulous selfishness were extinct—or, at least, as though they were so curbed and restrained by our modern social system as to be rendered, among persons of position and education, incapable of taking their old-fashioned course freely and blindly. When we are bound to recognise facts—when we are forced by them to see that the world, the flesh, and the devil still contrive to hold their own in spite of the

feeble circle of dykes and dams with which we strive to keep our level plains safe from the untamable sea outside—we have to resort to theories of lunacy, or if these, as is often the case, will not hold, to confess, if we are in an unusually modest mood, that our psychology is baffled.

But no: even as those who cross the sea change only the sky above them and not their own souls, so it is not human nature that changes—it is only places and times. All that man has done, man may do, in a far truer sense than that in which the proverb is usually employed: and as long as the passions of men endure, so long will endure the forms taken by their passions. It is not only in the Litany that malice will follow hard upon the heels of hatred, even in the hearts of sane men.

Warden had met Alice Raymond only the night before, and had made, as it seemed to him, good way. Whether he had or not, is another matter. He had never mixed much with women, and was not one of the initiated in the mysteries of ball-rooms: and so his vanity was easily gratified by nothings. He himself never did or said anything without a motive: and so he was not one to understand barren likings and flirtations that were honestly meant to be understood as pastime. Besides, he was not as

yet so genuinely in love with Miss Raymond for her own sake as to possess in himself and in his own feelings that infallible test whereby a man knows by instinct whether he is loved or no. He only knew that, for his own part, it was not a mere flirtation that he was carrying on with her. She must, he was assured, see what his feelings were towards her, and with what gratified vanity, ambition, self-interest, and desire of possession, it was not in his heart to draw back. He had set his heart upon this thing, even as he had formerly set it upon his fellowship: and it had always been his way where he had set his heart to set his hand. Any way, the fox could not tear himself away from the sight of the grapes, for all that they were to all appearance so far out of his reach: nor did he even console himself by calling them sour. But were they really out of his reach? What was the good of having brains and of knowing how to turn them to good account if he was to be balked by the mere passive existence of a girl like Marie, who had now succeeded in proving her stupidity to the full, if indeed anything had been wanting to prove it before? If he had but lived in the good old times of the water of Saint Nicholas! He was conscious of the very thought, and did not shrink from it.

Such a line of speculation may possibly be unusual: but it did not, at all events to him, seem to be so very horrible or so very unnatural when it first took the shape of an actual possibility. On the contrary, it carried with it that sort of pleasure which the first suggestion of something that may be done as well as dreamed of must always carry to a man of strong will, weak imagination, and few scruples: to a man, that is to say, whose nature leads him to take the shortest and most obvious road to the attainment of any given purpose, and whose eyes can see clearly but one thing at a time. It was at first a thought for Warden to caress and to play with as he sat over his breakfast preparing leisurely for the calls of the new day that, like every day, came to fix indelibly the results of the hours of candle-light and of darkness that had gone before. What was there in itself horrible in the thought? It was that of Marie lying, as sooner or later she must come to lie, silent and unconscious beneath the ground, out of the way of all evil, of all sorrow, of all trouble, and—of Mark Warden. He recalled to mind, with a sort of approving appreciation, that hopeless summing up of all human things that he had read in the 'Œdipus Coloneus,' "Surely the best thing for a man is not to be born: but, being

born, the next best thing for him is to die as soon as he may." He had got into a very dangerous region of speculation indeed, in which consequences seem confused and unreal in the overwhelming shadow thrown upon them by the immediate desire of self-gratification. He saw in Marie an evil spirit whom he had raised in a moment of folly, and who must be got rid of somehow, if not anyhow: and the purely moral means, now tried without result, had, in his practical mind, more than begun to blend with the physical, as is the way with men like him.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to define the limit between desire and determination—the point at which one ends and the other begins. And yet there must be some moment when the murderer in heart becomes so conscious of his desire that he consciously takes means to bring about its fulfilment. Were it not that one knows it to be the case, it would be impossible to conceive of the possibility of murder—to call things by their right names—so taking possession of a man's soul that the first actual step taken in accordance with such an idea, however unconsciously taken, should fail to drive away the thought at once, utterly and for ever. But that it does sometimes fail is only too certain: and the crisis of this undefinable limit had now been reached

by Mark Warden. Nor are chances and omens ever absent in such cases. The first book upon which he laid his hand, apparently by instinct, was an old work upon medical jurisprudence that happened to form part of his legal library. He opened it mechanically, and turned its leaves. He did not intend to do anything—let that be understood clearly: but he none the less began to call to mind all that in the course of his life he had happened to hear of the nature of poisons and of the difference of their several effects: how they acted upon the frame, and to what extent they left their traces upon it. There was matter and to spare for his meditation in that cold-blooded judicial treatise which changed into a collection of dry bones the fearful list of tragedies that had closed with the gallows. The gallows! yes, that had been the end of all these. But the tragedies upon which no sudden curtain had fallen—where were they? What had been their *dénouement*? That there was such he was convinced. Everybody in the world is not ignorant or stupid: and it is notorious that it is invariably through the ignorance or stupidity of the slayer that foul deaths are brought to light. He, at least, if it should become necessary to direct chance in the way it should go, would not fail by reason of stupidity or

ignorance. Nor did what met his eye as he turned the pages tend to diminish his self-confidence.

To him, in the state of mind in which he now was, such reading had the interest of nothing short of fascination. He felt, as his eye began to dwell longer and more systematically upon his book, as though he were entering into a new world in which it is the one object of human life to kill one's fellow-creatures without being found out, even as to a layman who reads a more purely medical treatise the disease of which it treats assumes at last such prodigious proportions as to seem as if it were the normal and proper condition of the human race, in which he also must of necessity be a sharer. And the more Warden read, the more lost in amazement he became at the bungling fashion in which all who had been discovered had, as it were with their own hands, knotted the rope round their own necks. "Murder will out," people say: but he could not help seeing that in point of fact it is the murderer himself who will out with it—that a man who quietly took the ordinary pains which he would take in any ordinary action of his life need scarcely be suspected unless he pleased. And then he thought, as a natural consequence, how many of those who are not suspected, whom the world honours, who are

without scruples and who profit by death every day — how many of these have taken the control of chance into their own hands? And why should I be more scrupulous than other men, when it is all so easy? It was not even as though a life like that of Marie would be missed or thought of, or would make a void in the ocean of society of the smallest appreciable kind for an appreciable instant. Besides himself, to whom could it matter whether she lived or died?

But where, it may be asked, was conscience all this while? Well, conscience was in the condition in which it usually is when there is most need for it to act—that is to say, fast asleep. For at the birth of Cain, says a certain Rabbi, the two angels, one good and one evil, that attended upon him as upon every man, wearied before hand of the prospect of the long watch which they would have to keep over one another, and which would prevent either of them from enjoying a moment's repose for little short of a thousand years, entered into a solemn compact with each other that they would divide the watch—that one should wake before deeds were committed, the other after them. But the question arose which watch should belong wholly to the good and which wholly to the evil. The latter, having the

craft of the serpent, obtained the first by the bribe of allowing his rival double power after deeds were done: and hence it is that, in the generation of Cain, conscience warns in the shape of a dim and doubtful dream, and wakes, not to warn as conscience, but to punish as remorse.

Warden had never, as some people do who would not without sentimental remorse injure so much as a flea, amused himself with speculating as to how he should go to work were he bent upon taking human life without a chance of discovery. In fact, he never amused himself with speculations at all: those in which he indulged had always some practical end, nor could he otherwise conceive of any one's indulging his fancy in so useless a way. With him, to entertain an idea meant to carry it out: and mental habits of this nature are almost omnipotent. Was there not, was then the next stage in his present course of speculation, in all that world in which his mind was now roaming at large, some one drug which would answer the purpose? Was it true, as he had heard his father say, that aconitine, for instance, if that was the name, would kill with certainty and with speed—would imitate the natural symptoms of probable disease, and leave no trace of itself behind? As a matter of curiosity he searched the pages of

his book, but could find no mention of it. Was it then merely a piece of medical superstition, or was it that it had never found its way into courts of justice simply because it was so safe and so sure? If there were such a drug, whatever its name might be, it must have been used: it was not likely to be known to Dr Warden of Denethorpe alone. This very effort of memory—for when he had heard the name he had let it slip by as a piece of useless knowledge unprofitable to him in the schools—had the effect of still more closely fixing and intensifying his thoughts and of giving them a still more certain direction in their dangerous path.

He was thus engaged, like some necromancer searching his books for some more potent spell to lay the fiend whom he had raised in the innocent form of Marie, when his ears were startled by the fall of a letter from the slit in the outer door of his chambers upon the floor of the passage. He hastily closed the volume, put it back in its place with a hurry for which he did not seek to account, and then picked up the letter, which was directed to him in a handwriting which he knew only too well, and which made him tear it open nervously. After all it was not even for Mark Warden to lay aside such a dream-book as he had chosen with a steady hand.

"MY DEAR FRIEND"—it began—"When I last saw you—the last time I shall ever see you—you must have thought me very stupid. I confess it, and am sorry that I did not understand better what you meant. Do not be afraid. When you receive this I shall be where I shall trouble you and be in your way no more. Why, indeed, should I care to live when my life is of service to none, and is only an injury to you?"

"My dear Mark—forgive my calling you so for the last time—for you have been very dear to me—how can I ever pardon myself, even if you can pardon me, for having been a drag upon you for so long? Believe me it was unknowingly. I always lived and worked for you and you only ever since that morning when I came to you at B———what a child I was then!—and my only thought has been how I could aid you and be as good a wife as I could to you till the time came which is never to come. And how could I tell that I was in your way unless you told me so? Thank you for having told me so now—it is a kindness more than I can say. It would have been dreadful indeed to have found it out too late.

"Do not think I am complaining—I am only trying to do what is right by you, as I have always tried to do. What your career may be henceforth

when you are freed from me I shall never know. I pray from my soul that it may be prosperous—that you may be happy. Only—let me implore you with my last words—let your life be true and honest, as I know that it will be brave and strong. It was not your fault, dear Mark, that we were obliged to deceive the world : but even so our deception, innocent and necessary as it was, has been the cause of all the unhappiness that I have caused you. Perhaps had we been brave enough to despise the world as it ought to be despised, and to have followed our own hearts, we might even by now have been to each other what we once wished to be—for you wished it once, I know, and I am sure that had you thought fit to trust me and had been able I should not have been unworthy of your trust. And—though I do not wish to stand in your way any more—I may at least ask you—if you do not understand me so much the better—to climb the hill that is before you as a man should : not to stoop to aid which is unworthy of any man, and above all, of you. A strong and true heart is worth all the wealth in the world.

“I should like to be able to say more to you—but I cannot : and there is no need, now that I am nothing to you any more. Good-bye, my dear friend—for such I know you would still be if you could :

and you have always been kind to me—far more kind and considerate than I deserved. I have never heard from you a harsh word : and it was not your fault that the end had to come. You never had the chance of learning to love me : and so perhaps it has been best. Good-bye, once more : do not quite forget me—think sometimes of your dead first love who would have been so good to you if she had only known how, and who will pray for you always.

“For the last time, good-bye.—God bless you always, and bring us both to meet again in Him.

“MARIE.”

Whether the train of thought in which he had been absorbed for the last hour or two had been nothing more than a vague and passing dream, or whether it was of a nature to ripen into actual deed, cannot be told. Such fancies are seeds which, though noxious, are oftenest barren : and so they might have proved with him. But they were so far in a way to promise blossom, if not fruit, that the reading of this letter gave him a shock such as a growing weed may, for the sake of comparison, be supposed to undergo when suddenly torn up by roots which it has extended far and firmly into the ground. Barren as such dreams for the most part prove, their fruit is

after all not seldom gathered: and such a harvest must always have been preceded by some such dreams as these. But, seeing that he had stopped at the sowing, let him have the benefit of any possible doubt. The fulfilment of his wish—for to the formation of a wish, at all events, he had come—is almost too horrible to conceive: and it would be too horrible, not almost, but altogether, did not the history of the most desperate of all crimes amply prove that such wishes have been fulfilled very often indeed—that the father of the thought is very likely to be the father of the deed also. Of course, with regard to such a question, every one must be left to form his own opinion according to his own experience of human nature. Only it is very certain that had Warden been born in some Italian city some very few hundreds of years ago, Messer Marco would not have been troubled long with Donna Maria: and that, however much place and time may vary, human nature is a thing that does not change.

He read and re-read the letter, however, precisely in the way that one would expect from a man of his nature, for men like him do not afford psychological surprises. He had not the imagination that was required to read the deep pathos that lay beneath the surface of the forced and lifeless words, or to

connect himself, the Mark Warden of the present, with the boy of five years ago. One must be something of a poet to remember not only one's childhood, but one's youth also: and Mark, when he married, had been under his one short spell of real youth which had been over long ago, while he was no poet to recall its shadow when its substance had gone for ever. So it was not to be expected of him that he should realise in his memory the time when he had loved the girl who had developed into a woman even more rapidly than he into a man.

But though the heart of such a man is proof against subtle touches, it need not be callous to gross blows: and it is due to him to say that the first effect of the letter was to wake him from his dream as if from a nightmare. He felt now like a necromancer indeed, or rather like the servant of a necromancer, who, ignorantly playing with his master's tools, has crossed the step that divides guilt imagined from guilt done. The letter could have but one interpretation. Marie might at that very moment be lying dead—dead for him, and, as he seemed to feel, dead by him. Could evil wishes travel with such lightning speed? Were they, indeed, so fatal? Conscience, when it does wake, scorns coincidences, and

turns into a superstitious self-accuser the most practical of men. Had he actually slain her with his own hand he would not have felt otherwise than he felt now.

But this was in the actual moment of waking, before reason, which always wakes the last, had woken also.

He read the letter again : and its meaning stared him full in the face, incredible as it still seemed to him. It could but have that one meaning, which he feared to recognise. Or was it after all only a ruse to alarm him—a woman's trick—a last resource to test him, if not to draw him back? But even he, devoid of imagination as he was, knew Marie well enough to reject such a suggestion as being more incredible than the other.

But there might be time to save her. It is far more easy for people to talk of death than to act as they talk. At all events he must satisfy himself as to what she did really mean. He placed the letter in his pocket, and had put on his hat, and was turning the handle of the door, when something restrained him.

Suppose she were dead or dying, what then? He could not save her. And it was very possible that he should only succeed in mixing himself up with

a very disagreeable affair, without the least necessity for so doing. No one knew of his connection with her: and that being the case, the best thing that he could do would be to ignore it altogether. Suppose, on the other hand, she were still living? In that case it was clear that the letter contained but an idle threat after all: and it would never do for him, by allowing her ruse to succeed, to put himself hopelessly in the wrong. She must be made to see that he was in earnest, and that she could not bring him back to her side by so vulgar an artifice as a threat of suicide.

Whether this were so or not, a very little while would show. On the whole, however, he was of opinion that the letter contained no mere threat, but was evidence of an impulse that had settled into a fixed determination. Its whole tone, the absence of studied effect, brought him to the same conclusion. At all events, he might safely feel that she would trouble him no more: and if so, was he answerable for anything that she might choose to do? Supposing that she had never written to him, not a shadow of responsibility would have been upon him, and why should he place himself deliberately in a worse position now? It would be ungrateful to his star, which had now, as it seemed, so wonderfully freed him from

the one burden of his life without obliging him to take the control of destiny into his own hands. The feeling of horror which the first perusal of the letter had given, gradually, as his spirits rose under the influence of relief, melted into one of positive satisfaction with himself for having resisted temptation. It was not long before he felt like a man who upon the eve of marriage has unexpectedly been disburdened of an inconvenient mistress. If he could only feel quite sure that she was actually no more, he would have been able, he flattered himself, to dismiss her from his mind altogether. For the first time the bugbear thought of "If it were not for Marie!" might pass out of his mind. It was so great a relief as to amount to the same kind of discomfort as that which a man feels, when he suddenly misses some dull chronic pain that has become so much a part of himself that when it first leaves him he cannot at first recognise himself without it.

For, after all, whether alive or dead, it was plain that she would trouble him no more—that was certain. There was really no need for him to fly to the idea of suicide, obvious as it was upon the face of the letter. He might fairly assume another theory by way of excuse for inactivity.

“Well,” he chose to think to himself—and, from his own point of view, the idea was not by any means very wild—“people never do what they don’t want to do. I thought she could not have been so stupid as she seemed: and so she has pleased herself and saved her credit as well. I daresay wherever she may be her friend the fiddler is not far off.”

But though he thus spoke to himself, he knew very well what he really believed in the matter, and what he wished in his soul to be true—that she would trouble him no more, because she herself had put it out of her power for ever.

If he could but have seen her when those few common-place words were wrung from depths of heart too deep to express themselves in any words that were not weak and poor!

When her lover, whom she now knew only too certainly that she loved with what was in truth her first real love, and with as much purity as if she had been as little a wife in law as in fact, had left her in such a condition as, seeing that the blossom of passion in such cases is always luxuriant in proportion to the hopelessness of its ever coming to its natural fruit, it would be better not to attempt to describe, the state of reaction in which he had found

her returned with tenfold intensity. Unfortunately—for it was unfortunate for once—Marie was anything but a hysterical subject, while her heart itself was far too sound and healthy to give her the relief of temporary unconsciousness. But some relief her spirit must have : and though she had wept already in the presence of her cousin, the relief came once more in tears. But the tears evoked by words of kindness are very different to those that came to her now.

Dry-eyed sorrow is said to be the worst of any : and so it is of all sorrows save one. The “summer tempest” of tears may save from death or worse, while a drought may do worse than slay. But with the summer tempest must not be confounded the storm in which the tears do not freshen and soothe the fevered ground, but scorch and scald : with which is not mingled the heaving of sobs, but the tense pain which seems as though it must end in strangulation : by which the brain does not seem eased of a load, but is changed into one leaden, aching pain, which excludes thought and reason and hope and memory, and all things but passive despair. It is with such tears as these that Niobe wept herself to stone.

But he did not see her, so that to him this true agony of soul, made up as much of self-accusation as of anything else, was inconceivable. And so alone, and utterly incapable of the exercise of volition or conscious thought, she was left to seek for herself the safety for which she instinctively longed.

CHAPTER VII.

WARDEN carefully folded up the letter and placed it in his pocket. He was fond of ruling circumstances: but at present there was nothing for him to do but to remain passive, and to let circumstances take care of themselves. Satisfied with the present aspect of things, he must carefully avoid consciously drawing from them the conclusions that in his heart he was glad and relieved to be able to draw, for his own conscience' sake. So that he might, as far as possible, separate himself from his hopes, and make them seem, even to himself, altogether external matters with which he had nothing to do, he sat down resolutely to read, and actually succeeded in holding his book resolutely before him. It seemed to him, as it has seemed to so many, besides the ostrich, under like circumstances, that, by shutting his eyes to Marie's fate, he thereby wholly disconnected himself from it and from all responsibility in respect of

it: that by ignoring her letter he put himself in the position in which he would have been had it never been written at all. But yet, for the first time in his life, his thoughts were really engaged in one thing while he was outwardly engaged with something entirely different. Every sound that he heard upon the stairs of the busy staircase on which he lived seemed to him to mean something—to be the forerunner of news, impossible as he knew it to be that he could hear any news indirectly, and even at third hand.

He was thus absorbed in making believe to be at ease, while he was, in fact, stretched upon the rack of suspense—that is to say, he was in a state of mind that he especially despised, holding, as he did fully, that all purposeless and unprofitable thinking, especially when it takes the form of doubting and dreaming, is sheer waste of time—when he was disturbed and startled by the thunder that he recognised as that which was wont to herald the entrance of Dick Barton.

But this with him was altogether a morning of self-contradiction. The usually unwelcome sound was for once not unwelcome: it was a relief to be disturbed, no matter who the visitor might be. What he really wanted was to forget Marie altogether

until her fate should prove itself beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Barton was looking not quite so much out at elbows as usual: for such men as he flourish in Cursitor Street as in their native air, and thrive upon what is altogether prostrating to men like Hugh Lester.

"Why, Barton—good morning," he said, more genially than usual, as he laid down his book.

"*'Erre es coracas!'* Good morning indeed! Why, I've just dropped in to wish you good-night. I say," he went on, throwing himself luxuriously into the arm-chair just vacated by Warden, which groaned a protest under the unaccustomed weight, "guess where I'm come from this time—a place you'll never see the inside of, any more than you will of Elysium: not that they're the same thing by any means—rather the other way. Old Slo is not exactly a Jupiter, except in having his own way: though Miss Rachel has a very fair notion of playing Hebe—except in the matter of perpetual youth. You never heard of old Slo or Miss Rachel? Well, you don't know what you lose, you respectable men. You have never seen the hookedest proboscis or the Iscariotest locks in all creation."

"I am quite content to be without that pleasure, I assure you."

"Well—they have their faults. For one thing, they are much more apt to welcome the coming—as long as he has a stray half-crown—than to speed the parting guest—when he hasn't: and for my society they have always shown a peculiar partiality. However, I am eating the crust of liberty once more, as you see. '*Quo me cumque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes*'—and now I'm yours. Don't look so frightened, though. I've got enough to buy my own crust to-day: and to-morrow one can but return to durance vile, tempered by champagne still viler. But to go back to our flocks, as a certain friend of ours would put it pastorally. I'm not going to ask you even for half-a-crown—but have you such a thing about you as a stray fifty guineas?"

"The devil!"

"What!—the immaculate Mark Warden swearing?"

"Why, my good fellow——"

"Why, what's fifty guineas to you? Besides, you'll be glad enough when I tell you with whom I have been conversing in the Elysian plains. Yes, I've been keeping the best of company, I assure you, where I come from—no less than that of an ex-M.P."

"What! with Lester? You don't mean to say ——"

"Yes. I tumble across most people in time. But I don't wonder you stare, all the same. I don't: but then I've seen too many things to stare at any of them, and have arrived at a state of *ataraxia*, which, by the way, proves the advice to Numicius to be wrong. Still, if any of the men of our time could have seen Lester in the same boat with Dick Barton! It's wonderful, though, how being down in the world brings out a man's good points. He really isn't a bad fellow, only he's profoundly green, and knows the world about as well as he knows his Horace—just enough not to make a false quantity or do a dirty thing."

"And is it from him—do you mean he asked you to apply to me?"

"He? No. Didn't I as much as say just now that he was a gentleman, and therefore an ass, in all but thickness of skin?"

"Then—what is it you expect me to do?"

"What does a man expect himself to do when the tables are turned and his friend is in want of a note or two?"

"I'm very sorry indeed to hear this about Lester."

"And the fifty guineas?"

"Why, you talk as if fifty guineas were the same as fifty pence."

"You haven't got so much, you mean?"

"I certainly have not."

"Well, that doesn't matter. You can join in a bill, I suppose?"

"I never join in bills, on principle. Besides, you don't seem to know the circumstances."

"Oh, bother the circumstances—and principle too. Who cares for circumstances? Here's a young fellow dropped by his natural relations, and not, I should say, a good hand at falling on his natural legs. Well, granted he's been ass enough to quarrel with his bread-and-butter, better men do that every day."

"Barton, I'm very sorry, as I said. But you must know that I haven't a penny more than I know what to do with—besides, I have"—"other claims," he was going to add, but stopped. "And if I could do anything," he went on, "still a man must accept the position into which he has put himself by his own fault and with his eyes wide open, as Lester has done. Besides, I and he have never been the friends you seem to think. We scarcely knew each other at Cambridge, and since then I have been useful to him, as a matter of business, and that is all. Still, of course, if I could help him I would—but this way of helping him would be childish: and not only childish, but wrong on every principle."

"What!—you won't, then?"

"Once more, I'm very sorry. But it is always best to say what one means at once. No."

Barton started from his seat. "Then — I'm shot if I ever speak to you again."

Warden knew how to be angry on occasions. "The punishment will not be greater than I can bear, I assure you," he said in answer.

"Cad!" exclaimed Barton, with angry contempt, and stalked out of the room.

"Thank heaven for that riddance, at all events," thought Warden to himself. Of course he had been quite right not to throw away his money upon Lester, or to be tempted from his wholesome principle of not putting his name to bills: his refusal to do either did not trouble him in the least, and to say No was always so easy a thing to him that he did not even feel vain, as many men with less moral courage would have done, of his firmness in the matter. And if the thought had troubled him, the fact of his having at last fairly succeeded in quarrelling with his Old Man of the Sea would have been ample compensation. His mind having been thus not unpleasantly excited, he turned once more to the page in the perusal of which he had been interrupted, and this time worked away with only very

little less energy than usual till it was time to prepare himself for the party in the evening at which he was engaged to be present, and where, of course, he expected to meet the lady of his love once more. Then, with no less care and attention than he bestowed upon what are usually, but most often wrongly, considered the more important concerns of life, he dressed himself to resume the thread of his own second and certainly more important life, and dismissed from his mind all thought of the branch of the law of contracts, which had been the ostensible subject of his day's study. He was by no means one of that class of students who are haunted during a waltz by the ghosts of the Six Carpenters, or whose one idea of beginning a conversation is contained in the words "A agrees with B."

And not only was Miss Raymond present, with her smile and her blue eyes, and the hair that was beginning to draw him into its innocent net for the sake of the unconscious angler herself, as well as for that of the metal of which it was woven, but Miss Clare also, to whom society was every day becoming more and more a necessary stimulant. It may seem strange that a series of evening parties should have the effect of a stimulant upon any one: but the sight of even the affectation of pleasure is

exciting to one who has never made acquaintance with its reality in any form.

It was not so that Warden regarded it. He could scarcely be said to have enjoyed the details of the society into which he was now making such good way, any more than he could be said to enjoy the differential calculus or the law of contracts itself. But it was all in his day's work, and so he never suffered himself to be bored: the result of which was that he bored no one. On what precise footing he stood it would be hard to say, seeing that he was neither a man of great fortune, nor a famous traveller, nor a man of title, nor a dancing man, nor a singing man, nor a wit. But then, whatever his footing was, it was thus rendered all the more secure by the fact of his having nothing to lose. He could not well become poorer: he could not be expected to dance or sing, so that he was superior to the risks of gout and hoarseness: he was not likely to make enemies by his tongue, as wits do, and he was in no fear of being cast into the shade by the next newcomer from Lake Tchad or Cape Lopatka. The truth is, that to enter what is called society, and to hold one's own in it successfully, demands on the part of a man who stands alone only three things: a good coat, a pair of gloves, and the power of hold-

ing his tongue. The great and safe rule is *audi, vide, tace*: and a man is called agreeable not by reason of what he says, but by reason of what he does not say. But if in addition to these three requisites he has the power of talking unobtrusively when there is occasion, then so long as he carefully refrains from saying a single word that the hearer can remember for a single second after it is spoken, he can go where he will and do almost anything that he pleases. He will not often be talked about, indeed, but he will be missed: and when he is mentioned, it will be with the sincere praise of those who are grateful beyond measure to any one who will just abstain from boring them, as wits and lions are apt to do. After all, a prolonged roar is scarcely less fatiguing and wearisome than a bray, and is much more alarming. Such a man will not of course obtain a success of the very first order: but he will be accepted as a perfectly gentlemanly and agreeable fellow, and will be credited with all the good qualities which, because he does not show them, interfere with the *métier* of no one. The great mistake by which men with far better introductions and social qualities than Mark Warden lose their chance, is that of trying to make themselves agreeable: for to try and to fail is to be lost for ever,

while to try and to succeed is only to make more foes than friends.

But still, though the requisites are few, to make proper use of them is by no means such an easy matter. It demands a watchful eye, a steady hand, a cool head, and a genius for self-restraint, in order that the aspirant for social honour may make no false step and lose no opportunity. In a word, it demands Tact—a comprehensive quality in which Warden showed signs of ere long becoming a perfect proficient. He showed great tact, for instance, on this occasion, by not at once devoting himself to Miss Raymond, while he was what some uncharitable people might call obsequiously attentive to Miss Clare. To make a point of preferring the old to the young is in itself sufficiently graceful: and not only is it graceful in itself, especially on the part of a young man, in whom it may be supposed to imply some exercise of self-denial, but it is very likely indeed to have its reward. To pay court to the mother is by no means a bad way of paying court to the daughter: and it is a still better way of paying court to the daughter's fortune. It is true that such a relation did not exist in this case: but then Miss Raymond was so unselfish and so grateful for attentions paid to her old friend, that

Warden by this means probably made much better way in her good graces than if he had hung about her for the whole of an evening. Had she only had, indeed, a little more selfishness in her, in the shape of a little more intensity of nature, she would have been a heroine with whom not Mark Warden only, but the reader of this also, would have been in love. As it was, however, she was far too good to take rank as a heroine.

But these two were by no means the only noteworthy people present when Warden arrived. It was a very grand party indeed—one of those which would supply a list of guests to the 'Morning Post' of at least half a column in length. Such half columns, however, are not interesting reading, except to a few strangely constituted minds: and though the 'Trumpet' may afford an occasional quotation, the 'Court Circular' can scarcely be held to be worth transcribing at the best of times. Of course the presence of a royal duke cannot be passed over in silence: but otherwise from such a mob of titles as was there it is impossible to choose. It was just such a gathering as the ordinary human creature would cheerfully give the whole length of both his ears to have seen but once in a lifetime: and it would have sent poor Lorry wild with excitement

and wonder could she have supposed it possible that the "Mr Warden" whose name crept in just before the "&c., &c.," with which the list closed, was her own brother Mark. She would have hung up the sheet of the paper in a frame in the drawing-room, and have made her ninety-nine prostrations before it every day.

Indeed it would have been the height of presumption on her brother's part had he at once made his way to Miss Raymond's side instead of patiently waiting his turn. She was at that moment the most envied of her sex in the room, for she had actually, without an effort, done what had hitherto been regarded as impossible. She had succeeded in making the young Earl of Farleigh, the great catch of that and of many other seasons, engage in something approaching to conversation with one who was neither a ballet-girl, an actress, or even a foreigner. Even Warden, sensible man as he was, felt an uncomfortable feeling, which in a less sensible man would have been jealousy, when he saw her thus engaged. Tory as he professed to be in his politics, he was at that moment as real a Radical as Mr Prescott himself.

Once more the great *prima donna* was singing, whom Angélique had not succeeded in driving from

her throne. Miss Raymond was listening with all her ears: her companion, a feeble and rather worn-out-looking young man, with an affectedly foreign air, was looking languidly at the ceiling.

"Oh, is not that glorious?" exclaimed Miss Raymond, with real enthusiasm, and not as a bait for the titled connoisseur.

"Hm!" he answered, letting his eyes drop upon her from the ceiling for a moment. "Yes—*très-bien*. But you should have heard what's her name sing it in Venice. Were you ever in Venice?"

"Never. It must be very interesting."

"It is the most interesting place in the world. Why, when I was there last, there was a girl there who does the *pas de Bortas* better than Pucini, on my honour: and as for what's her name—ah, I wish you had heard her sing: but then English people are such asses. Don't you hate England, Miss Raymond?"

"It would be very ungrateful in me if I did."

"Why? Because you were born in it? I should say it was England ought to be grateful to you, then, not you to England. By Jove, I don't feel grateful to England at all. I never could see why a man should be bound to like a fog just because he happened to be born in November."

"And yet you are kind enough to come and look after us sometimes? I wonder at that, after you have seen the *pas de Boréas* and heard what's her name."

"Ah, Miss Raymond, do not taunt me with my misfortunes. I never was meant for an English peer. Nature intended me to be an Italian *impresario*—I am sure of it. *Corpo d'un cane!* One might live one's own life if it weren't for one's confounded title and one's stake in the country, as they call it. Don't you hate the country, Miss Raymond? For my part, I like my steak in town."

"It is a pity one cannot make exchanges. I dare say my friend Monsieur Prosper there would exchange places with your lordship with pleasure."

"He'd make a great mistake if he did. Ah, here he is—the lucky dog! What have you got in England now, Prosper? I'm fresh from *la bella Italia*, you know, where one drops before the age about what you call your theatres—pig-styes, by Jove! And how are you? It's a long time since that big evening at Paris—when we came to such jolly grief, don't you remember? And how's Coralie and Delphine, and that other little thing, you know?"

Miss Raymond, who was not interested in the health of Coralie, or of Delphine, or even of the

other little thing, hastily turned to speak to some one else. Monsieur Prosper bowed low.

"I am much honoured by my lord's recollection. I am afraid there is not much going on. Your lordship sees——"

"Oh, hang my lordship! Why can't you call me Signor Farlini? And why isn't there much going on? There ought to be. You fellows are not half up to your work! Papageno of Venice—he's the man! He's got the Ranuzza: of course you know the Ranuzza?"

"Ranuzza?"

"What!—you don't? By Jove! she's the finest singer in Europe—shakes on F sharp in altissimo, and has a compass of six octaves, at least. She'd astonish you rather. And then you talk of Catalani! I thought of bringing her over with me here, and I would have, too, only we quarrelled the night before I left. I wish you could hear her swear, Prosper—it's positively charming! But I think I must really take a house one of these days. I'd have Corbacchione and Barbagianni and the Ranuzza, of course: and one might have Catalani for the small *rôles*—Papageno should conduct, and you should lead the orchestra. What do you think? We should rather astonish the town, shouldn't we?"

"Rather, my lord," said Prosper, dryly.

"And haven't you really got anything new?"

"Shall I tell your lordship a secret? I have found a pearl of pearls—only she does not sing."

"Dance, does she? Well, she won't do the *pas de Boréas* like the Babbuina—that's the name!—or I'll eat my head—not if she swears like Ranuzza."

"She's only a pianist, my lord. But it will be quite safe to believe in her. I mean her to be the first artist in the world before I have done with her, and to make people rave about fingers as much as they do about toes."

"Oh, hang your key-boards! I know—short and fat, isn't she, with a German name all consonants, and spectacles?"

"Not at all, my lord. She is young and pretty, is *ma petite Marie*, and one *raffoles* about her even now."

"Young and pretty? Ah, that's different. *Chi nasce bella nasce* anything she pleases. But she isn't English, I hope?"

"She is French, my lord."

"Then she might do—if she takes an Italian name. Is she here to-night?"

"Not yet, my lord. But she will be immediately. It is past her time already—she ought to play the very next."

Marie had established that most dangerous of characters—a reputation for punctuality. If any other public performer had not appeared for an hour, or even for three hours after her time, or had even not appeared at all, no one would have wondered, far less been alarmed about her. But Marie was a subdivider of minutes: and if her fixed second passed without her appearing, something must inevitably have happened for which not even her milliner was of sufficient consequence to be held responsible. It had by this time become the fashion for people to expect to hear Marie Lefort, and her presence was almost necessary to give distinction to any party in which music professed to be a conspicuous element: so that her absence was missed, at all events, to the extent of making people comment upon it, which is perhaps the greatest extent to which any one can expect to be missed at all.

Prosper, for reasons of his own, perhaps not altogether unconnected with the presence of so distinguished a patron of the fine arts as Lord Farleigh, was particularly bent upon Marie's appearance on this particular evening: and when first half an hour and then an hour had passed by, and there was no sign of Mademoiselle Lefort, he went and spoke to Félix.

“How is it that Marie is not here?”

The heart of Félix gave a leap. "Was she to have come?"

"Of course. More than an hour ago. Have you seen her to-day?"

"Yes: for a little while."

"And she said nothing about this evening?"

"Nothing."

"She cannot have forgotten it—she never forgets. It is not far—I wish you would take a coach and go to Berners Street. It will put me out terribly if she does not arrive."

This was his euphemism for "I hope there is nothing the matter with her."

Félix had his own reasons for a similar fear of a much stronger nature. It was in itself anything but an agreeable commission for him to undertake, but his anxiety was sufficiently powerful to prevent his thinking about himself. So he left the house at once and hastened eastward.

CHAPTER VIII.

HE reached Berners Street with all the speed that the first coach he found could carry him. The horse was not quite worn out, and the driver, with the prospect of a double fare before him, did his best to make the whip supply the place of youth. But to Félix it seemed as though he were being drawn by a snail, and a hundred times he was on the point of stopping the carriage, and of making the energy of exercise compensate for the tediousness of time. Even steam seems to creep along at the rate of something less than two miles an hour when the desire to be doing something is the last resource of the impatience of anxiety. Oxford Street seemed to have transformed itself into a sort of *Teufels-Kreis*, or diabolic circle, of which the apparent straightness was caused by the immeasurable length of its diameter. At last, however, his journey was at an end. He knocked loudly and rapidly at the door which he had left that

morning in a state of mind that had then seemed to him the very climax of bitterness, but which now, if by so doing he could be relieved from his present suspense, he would have voluntarily recalled.

Anxiously, and with an undefined expectation of hearing all manner of ill of a nature that he dared not put into shape, he asked the landlady of the house, who opened to him and who knew him well, if Miss Lefort was at home. During his ride his presentiment of evil had grown into almost monstrous proportions: and it seemed to have already borne fruit, when he was still further plunged into the sea of suspense by hearing that she had left the house that afternoon and had not yet returned.

Knowing what he knew, and fearing what he feared, the news, trivial in itself, seemed to portend the worst: and he was not long in betraying his alarm to the landlady. He was not too apt to be cool at the best of times, and it was scarcely likely that he should be able to conceal his anxiety now.

"Did you see her before she went out?" he asked. "Did she say where she was going?"

"Yes: she just said as she was going out for a bit. You don't think anything the matter, sir, do you? She wasn't like your play-acting folks in a general way—no offence to you, Mr Grevil—as nobody

knows which is their head nor which is their tail, as one may say: she were always so quiet, and always paid so regular."

"Did she seem disturbed—unhappy?"

"I don't know about disturbed exactly, Mr Grevil. She seemed in a dream like—but she'd often be so. But I've thought a good while she didn't be like she ought to. She didn't eat half enough for a mouse's life, let alone a young woman's, as ought to have their meals regular, or they pays for it in the end: and she were always at practice, practice, practice, from week's end to week's end——"

"And she said nothing to you of where she was going?"

"No, Mr Grevil. She just went out, like as she might any day, though I did say to her——"

"She was to have been in Park Lane this evening, and she has not come. I daresay she has forgotten it, but——"

"Lord, Mr Grevil," interrupted the landlady, like an echo of Monsieur Prosper, "she never forgets nothing. And if anything *was* for to happen, as there's females knocked down before their very eyes by them coaches, as I well know, not to speak of that nasty orange-peel—oh dear, oh dear——"

“And——”

“There—that’ll be her!” suddenly exclaimed the landlady, as a gentle knock was heard at the door. “Thank goodness—that’s what I say.” And she ran to open it, Félix following her.

“Is my cousin at home?” asked a voice from the dark door-step: and the heart of Félix, that had been buoyed up by momentary hope, sank again within him as he recognised the voice of Angélique: and that voice which would once have been sufficient to raise him from an even deeper depth of anxiety, and to fill him with courage, now served only to make his depth of anxiety deeper still. But still all things were possible: and she might know something of Marie’s movements during the afternoon.

But this chance also proved to be vain. “What—Monsieur Créville!” she exclaimed. “Can you tell me where I can go to look for Marie, if she is not at home?” She had some business to do for me with Monsieur Prosper——”

“Ah, perhaps then she has gone to Golden Square,” exclaimed Félix, abruptly, trying all he could to battle with the fear that had now almost developed into certainty. I will go and see. Wait for me here—I will not be gone an instant.”

The idea was a mere straw, and he knew it. If she had wished to see Prosper she would not have gone where, knowing he would be in Park Lane, she knew he would not be. But still, before Angélique had time to ask a question, he was gone, and she was left to gather from the vague apprehensions of the landlady his fears for the safety of Marie, which were too genuine not to have proved contagious.

This time he did not take a coach—indeed his pocket was once more in its habitual state of emptiness. It was fortunate for him, however, that his pace did not call down upon him the cry of “Stop thief!” and at the end of about twenty minutes he returned.

“Miss Lefort,” he began rapidly, all out of breath, and with the sweat streaming from his forehead, “I have the gravest fears about your cousin. And I am afraid I am the most to blame. You may not think there is much in her going out and not being yet returned. But you know her regular ways and her punctuality, and——”

“You fear an accident—an accident to Marie? *O mon Dieu!*”

“This morning I saw her, as you know: and I heard from her something—do you know her secret, Angélique?”

Of course Angélique knew nothing about it: but even then she was sufficiently true to herself not to permit such a thing as a secret to escape her, if she could help it. So she went on,—

“Of course I know all about Marie—everything. We are sisters, and there is nothing but confidence between us in all things.”

“Do you know what I mean?”

“I can guess. And you may speak freely to me, whatever it may be.”

Though she did not in the least know what he meant, she was perfectly honest in her belief that she possessed Marie's whole confidence: that there in fact existed between her and her cousin a partnership in confidences which was none the less complete because it resembled what the civilians used to call a *societas leonina*—that is to say, a partnership in which all the profit was on one side.

“In any case this is no time for secrets now,” said Félix. “What is the name of her husband? where is he to be found?”

“Of her husband!” Angélique exclaimed, in genuine astonishment. “She told you she had a husband?”

“What! you did not know it?”

“*Mon Dieu!* But it is impossible!”

“When she herself told me so?”

"Ah, then it is true. And yet that I did not know it!"

To do her justice, she was really wounded by the thought that so important a confidence should have been withheld from her by the open-hearted Marie and given to a stranger. But a light suddenly broke upon her. In spite of her anxiety about the only creature whom she loved, and in whom she had, at all events till now, thoroughly believed, a presage of triumph as complete as it was unexpected suddenly filled her heart with what was almost the eagerness of joy. Had she indeed caught her enemy upon the hip at last?

"Félix," she exclaimed rapidly, with all its usual hard listlessness gone out of her face, and supplied by an energy that was as fierce as it was hard—"Félix, you are right: the time for secrets has gone by. You love me no longer, then? Well, in that you are right too. Were I a man I would love where you love now. Oh, my poor Marie! Yes, I do know the name of her husband. It is that of the vilest villain upon earth—it is Mark Warden. You hate him, do you not? But you cannot hate him more than I."

He looked at her for a moment amazed, and then the ground of Barton's suspicion grew clear.

"What!" he said; "Warden, the friend of Barton—Warden, who is to marry Miss Raymond?"

"Yes, that is the man. Who can tell what he has done with her when he has so much to gain by——"

It was not this that he feared: and, in fact, the idea was almost too monstrous to be entertained—too horrible even to be thought of. But yet he started.

"You mean ——" he began. "But no—that cannot be."

"Ah, you do not know this man! Oh Marie! if you had but told me——"

Félix was far too excited, far too worn out to think, or indeed to dream of anything but blindly obeying whatever impulse might seize him at the moment. Indeed, when he had plunged into the chamber of fire to save the husband of her whom he now loved so passionately, he was acting far more under the dictates of calm reason than he was capable of acting now. He was simply drunk with despair, and the words of Angélique acted upon him like fresh draughts of fiery wine.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "then there is but one chance left. There is a chance that he may know—and, if it is too late to save her, yet——"

Without another word he was gone.

"Félix!" cried out Angélique, in real alarm, "what are you going to do? Wait—do not be rash——"

But her words were lost in the closing of the street-door, and she was left to unravel this new complication alone.

It was scarcely yet more than half-past eleven by the time that Félix again reached Park Lane, where Prosper, not without more anxiety of heart than he cared to own to himself—for what, after all, is really worth the anxiety of an artist but art, and of a speculator but money?—had to make the best excuses he could for the non-appearance of his favourite *lionne*. The rooms were thus at their fullest when the most obscure of their guests, all disordered by running, re-entered them. The star was once more displaying her brilliancy, amid a running accompaniment of conversation, which is so apt to languish when people are met to talk, but invariably grows lively when people are met to listen. Lord Farleigh had found his favourite position—the door: and Mark Warden had at last been rewarded by finding his, which was by the side of Alice Raymond.

But, in spite of the incessant buzz of what people

are pleased to call conversation that filled the room, a semi-chorus of "Hush!" as Félix entered it without too much regard to the quality of those whom he was disturbing, recalled him for a few moments to himself. It was not that he was afraid of anything or of anybody: but the immediate plunge of a man heated by excitement into a room-full of company who for the most part are rather bored than otherwise, is the sudden contact of red-hot iron with iced water.

But such contact hardens, if it cools. As soon as the *cavatina* had reached its final chord he took the opportunity, and the liberty, of disregarding the sacred line that was drawn between the amusers and the unamused by going up straight to Warden, whom by sight and repute he knew well enough.

"Mr Warden," he said, in a tone that could certainly be heard by Miss Raymond if by no one else, "I am sorry to disturb you, but I bring you grave news, if you do not know it already. Madame, your wife, is missing from home: and I fear—it is feared, that something may have happened to her. Do you know where she is? If not——"

And so the message had come at last that Warden had ever since the morning been longing yet dreading to hear. But so many hours had now elapsed

since he had received Marie's last words that he had begun to feel at ease, and as though what he had been expecting had been indefinitely postponed. So, now that it had come, he, for the first time in his life, felt his heart sink with apprehension, and almost with a guilty fear. But, as he had been steeling himself all day long to receive the message when it came, he was not taken by surprise. He did not even start: and when he saw the bearer of it, his resolution was taken in a moment. Not even the most scrupulous, he felt, could blame him for protecting himself now that she who might have claimed some self-sacrifice on his part needed it no more. As for grief or remorse, he felt neither. It was part of his nature to be incapable of entertaining more than one idea at once: and for these he had no space for the present.

"Pardon me," he said, quietly and politely, "are you sure that you are not mistaking me for some one else."

"Are you not Mr Warden?"

"That is my name. But you spoke of my wife: and as I do not happen to have one——"

If this was not the tone of a murderer, neither was it that of a husband. And yet that he was, or rather had been, the husband of Marie, could not be

doubted for a moment. He had heard that Marie was a wife from her own lips : and Angélique's certainty, confirmed by what he had heard from Barton, had become of necessity his own.

"You are not married to Marie Lefort?" he asked.

"No."

There was nothing now for Warden to do, now that fate had shown itself so clearly to be on his side, but to accept its kindness. It would at all events be an act of the grossest folly and weakness on his part to have taken such pains to keep his secret while Marie was living only to let it go now that it was past finding out.

Just then Prosper, seeing Félix in the room, came up to him. "Well?" he asked.

Félix, however, replied to Warden. "I do not pretend to understand you," he said. "Do you mean to say that you were never married to Made-moiselle Lefort?"

Warden looked at him with an affectation of carelessness, pointedly taking note of his appearance from his boots, white with dust, to his disordered hair.

"Prosper," he said, "if this is a friend of yours, had you not better get him away? He seems to have been at the sideboard once too often."

The eyes and the attention of several in the room were drawn to where they were standing. "Come, Félix," said Prosper, "come away. What is all this business? What about Marie?"

But Félix did not stir.

"You accuse me of being drunk," he said in a loud voice, so that all the room might hear. "That is all very well, though you know that I am no more drunk than you are. You are a liar at the very least, if not something worse than a liar."

The blood rushed back into Warden's face, which ordinarily only showed emotion by pallor. He, too, had his ideas of honour, which rebelled at a public insult, though, to serve his purposes, he had habitually borne the insulting speeches of Barton when there was none by to hear. Besides, his situation, however safe it might be, was at all events becoming ridiculous, and it was necessary, if possible, to avoid a scene about which people might talk afterwards.

"You drunken rascal," he said, half fiercely, half scornfully, "if you were a gentleman I would knock you down. As it is, you may congratulate yourself that I do not have you kicked from the room. Go home quietly, and let us have no more of this nonsense, unless you want to be put out by main force."

"You submit then to be called a liar? Am I to call you coward also?"

Such a mode of resenting Warden's insult as this was of course as absurd and as impolitic as could be conceived. Morally convinced as Félix was of being in the right, his conviction rested upon evidence that was nothing more than hearsay and circumstantial, and was devoid of anything like proof. But he would have been more or less than human had he been capable of acting otherwise than absurdly now. It was not, after all, his own insult that he was thus resenting—though that, too, stung through his republican armour into the most sensitive part of his nature—so much as the wrongs of Marie, however convinced he might be that she was now beyond the reach of all wrong for evermore. In short, had he kept his temper, he would have proved himself to be either a match for Mark Warden or else a stone—and he was neither.

The latter laughed. "Do you expect me to call out a tipsy fiddler?"

"Some might think themselves bound to do that, if he called you both liar and coward. A fiddler may not impossibly be a gentleman, and a gentleman may most certainly get drunk. But, in any case, I fancy that a Mr Warden is scarcely in a

position to stand upon his *noblesse* with a Marquis de Créville."

The whole scene had been so far precisely like a regular comedy, of which this formed the climax. A laugh ran through the room, of which such of the occupants as had formed the audience, who, thanks to the unsubdued tones of Félix, were not a few, had, according to their sex, been fluttered or amused, and now were amused outright. But, though what naturally seemed a crazy or drunken vaunt fell with the effect of a blank cartridge upon him and upon those for whom it had been intended, there was one present of whose very existence Félix had scarcely heard, through whose heart the name that for more than thirty years had not been spoken by man passed with the sudden sharpness of lead.

A short, quick cry called the attention of the whole room from its immediate attraction. Miss Clare had risen from her seat, and was standing with her eyes fixed upon Félix in a rigid attitude, as though she were prevented from rushing forward by some unseen force, stronger than her own, that held her back. In truth she was both deaf and blind to what was about her. Her ears were filled by the roaring of water, and her eyes by the round summits of snowy hills.

CHAPTER IX.

ANGÉLIQUE waited for the return of Félix in vain. At last, however, it was so evident that all chance of his coming back was over for that night at least, that she made up her mind to pass the time till morning where she was : an arrangement to which Marie's landlady, whose mind was filled with nameless and impossible visions of terror, in which orange-peel, though it was now the summer, held a conspicuous place, made no objection. But she was never a very sound sleeper at the best of times : and on this occasion she found repose out of the question, even though, for once, she would have been only too glad to have forgotten herself altogether. It must be remembered that her love for Marie was real and genuine, even although the spire of its shrine was in general overshadowed by the tower of the cathedral that she had raised to her own self. Not knowing either what Félix or what Warden knew, and being perhaps

more ready to suspect the extreme of evil even than most people are—for trust in human nature, if it be not altogether an act of folly, is still incompatible with such absence of foolishness as hers—she saw in the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Marie the most terrible end of all. In a word, she more than suspected Warden of having actually carried out what had in fact only passed through his mind. As soon as morning came she went straight to where Félix lived: but he had not been in all night. Then she went to Golden Square: but Prosper had gone out early, leaving word that the hour of his return was uncertain. Then she did what it might have occurred to some women to do first of all: she went to Cursitor Street, of which her husband was still an unwilling colonist.

He had been reading the 'Trumpet' all the morning: and, as usual, instead of skimming its cream as formerly, in the space of a cup of coffee, had read it through from the first birth to the last auctioneer's advertisement, as a man does who knows that, when he has read his newspaper, nothing will be left for him to do but to read it through all over again. It is wonderful how a man will cling to his newspaper when it is the only link left that binds him with the great world. Hugh read with far more interest than

he would have taken in the realities, accounts of debates that concerned him not, of budgets that made him neither richer nor poorer, of parties to which he was not invited, and of marriages of acquaintances in which the modern fashion of "no cards" was anticipated for him alone. It did not even concern him that "we understand that there is to be no contest for the representation of Dene-thorp. Mr Prescott has not announced his retirement: but his active canvass has ceased, and it is considered certain that he will not go to the poll. Unless, therefore, as is exceedingly improbable, a new candidate should appear at the last moment, Mr M. Warden will be declared duly elected at the nomination, which is fixed for the 29th instant. Mr Warden, who will support the government, is a fellow of St Margaret's College, Cambridge, and a native of the town that he will represent."

"Angélique," he exclaimed, throwing down the paper as she entered the room, "I cannot stand all this any more. When I can once get out of this there will be nothing for it but to enlist: and you must go back to Miss Raymond, if she will have you. There are plenty of better men than I turn troopers, I believe: and if one did one's duty one might get one's commission after a while, especially

if there should be a war. I have done my best, and the game has gone against us. I've been thinking about it all night, and there's absolutely nothing else left to do."

Under ordinary circumstances the idea would not have displeased her. But now she had something else to think of. In as few words as she could she gave him a full account of her facts and of her fancies. Her story seemed to hang together well—better even than she had herself fancied. But to Hugh it seemed incredible. Unlike her, he was not prone to think extreme evil: and the thought of murder is always incredible to any but policemen—at least until it has developed into deed.

"You must be wrong," he said. "There can be no such villain in the world."

But the old legal test of "*Cui bono?*" upon which every one acts consciously or unconsciously, and whether he is a lawyer or no, was only too applicable in this case. In a word, Marie had disappeared from the world, her husband was to marry Alice Raymond, and scarce anything was wanting but the *corpus delicti* to bring the case fairly home.

"I cannot believe it," he went on, "but it must be looked into, for Warden's sake as well as Marie's. She may—she must yet be found. I do not believe

that any one can disappear without leaving traces of some sort. But what can I do here? Angélique, I *must* get away from this place. Can we make no arrangement, if only for a time?"

Every one knows the saying, "Talk of the devil." Every one accuses that luckless personage, who has to answer for everybody's ill-luck besides his own, of being the father of all evil: and so it must logically follow on the strength of the proverb that teaches that money is the fount and origin of all evil, that money and the devil are one. Hence, as often happens among doctors, there is a conflict of doctrine. On the one hand, speech of the devil brings about the projection of his horns: on the other hand, it is only too certain that one may talk of money as much as one pleases without thereby even raising so much as the shadow of a farthing's ghost. Probably Lester himself would have agreed with the great Cornelius, when, being persuaded by some Wagner or other to raise the devil,

" In the startled student's face
He threw—an empty purse."

But there is no rule without an exception. One may occasionally take the devil's name in vain without even seeing so much as the tip of a single horn: and it did once, at least, happen that speech of money

had the same effect as that which comes from reciting the *Pater-noster* backwards.

It came about in this wise. A letter—in itself now an unusual event for one to whom every post used in the old times to bring a mass of correspondence of all sorts and kinds, from the scrawl of the Denethorp voter to the scarcely more legible scrawl of a fine lady—was brought to him by the hands of the young lady the hue of whose hair had excited Dick Barton's admiration. It contained two things. One of them was a blank cheque signed by Miss Clare: the other was the following, in the handwriting of Miss Raymond:—

“DEAR MR LESTER,—I am sorry to have to tell you that Miss Clare was taken very ill suddenly, last night. We are in much anxiety about her. She has expressed a strong desire to see you, and I hope that you will be able to come at once. She bade me send you the enclosed, in order that there may be no delay.—Believe me, yours truly,

“ALICE RAYMOND.”

There was certainly no occasion for Hugh to feel over-delicate now, even where money was concerned. At all events, Angélique had no scruples, and looked at the blank cheque, payable to bearer, with glisten-

ing eyes. She had learned the value of money by this time, and had discovered the extent to which the touch of Mammon may bring consolation, even for the loss of a sister.

"Oh, Hugh," she exclaimed, "she will forgive you at last! and I shall not have been your ruin, after all!"

Hugh, however, looked very grave indeed. "Her forgiveness will not bring me much happiness if this is my doing." He was looking at the letter, not at its enclosure. "But I must see her. How much will it want to get me out of this? I am detained by so many that I do not know how I stand."

She made a rapid calculation. A very little, comparatively speaking, would suffice to set him free, at least for the present. Fifty pounds, she had told Marie. But she was not going to lose her opportunity, and so she said,—

"You will want not less than twelve hundred pounds. Shall I fill it up at once?"

"Yes."

"And I will cash the cheque at once, and settle. Shall I?"

"As soon as possible. I must not stay here a moment longer than I can help."

So, after another short calculation as rapid as the

first, she filled up the cheque for three thousand pounds. It was altogether a good day's work for her. Whatever might happen now, she was secure of a capital to start with for the present, even though Miss Clare's death without a will in her husband's favour might oblige her to begin the world again, and to fight its battle alone. At all events, she would not be without capital, even should she fail in her hope for better things. Perhaps had Miss Clare known which was the acting partner of the firm, she would not have left it to Hugh to fill up the piece of paper that was to be his passport to freedom.

It was evening before Hugh left Cursitor Street behind him, and was fairly on his way to his aunt's house. There is no need to dwell upon his mental sensations as he drove along: he had no time to think of himself, his own sudden and unexpected liberty, or his own speculations upon the nature of the coming and equally unexpected interview: he was simply a man in a hurry, perhaps in a dream also: but nothing more. The door was opened by a footman who did not know him, and who told him that Miss Clare was too ill to be seen.

"I am Mr Lester—Miss Clare's nephew. Is Miss Raymond with her?"

"Miss Raymond is with her, sir, and Mr Warden."

"Please to let Miss Raymond know that I am here."

He waited down-stairs for a few minutes, and then there entered to him, not Miss Raymond, but Mark Warden.

"The servant told me of your visit, Lester," he said: "but I fear it is too late."

A few hours since Warden was the very man whom of all others he wished to see. But this was no time for him to attend to the concerns of one of whom he knew personally next to nothing, now that his aunt was dying.

"You do not mean——" he began.

"I am grieved to tell you that I fear we must make up our minds to the worst. It seems to be some kind of stroke or other: and that, in her state of health—— Dr King has been with her, and we expect him again hourly. But the worst of it is the view that she herself has taken of her condition. She has just had a long interview with Mr West——"

"The solicitor?"

"Yes — and she has been apparently terribly fatigued and excited."

"I must see her, if possible."

"I fear it is impossible. Any sudden shock——"

"Does she know I am here?"

"No. That is why I came down to you. She is now quiet and resigned. The sight of you would disturb her dreadfully after all that has happened."

"But she wished to see me."

"I am afraid the wish is over. You could do her no good, and you might do her a great deal of harm. I do not mean that all hope is over—far from it, thank God—but——"

"I suppose I may see Miss Raymond?"

"Miss Raymond is with her. Even I dare not disturb Miss Clare by going into the room."

Warden was beginning to play the part of master of the house a little prematurely: at least so it seemed to Hugh, who, disinherited as he was, could not see that anybody had so good a right to give orders in it as he.

"Even you?" he asked. "Then I will take the responsibility." He rang the bell. "Go up," he said to the footman, "and tell Miss Raymond that Mr Lester is here."

The man looked at Warden.

"Do you hear?" repeated Hugh; "or must I go myself?"

"And make a scene in a dying room?" asked Warden.

"Yes, if you do not let me go quickly. Miss Raymond told me to come; and unless she herself, with her own lips, tells me to go away again, I must remain. One would think, Warden, that you had some desire to keep me away."

"Oh, not the least. Her will is made, if that is what you are thinking of. But, if you make imputations, go up quietly, John, and let Miss Raymond know that Mr Lester wishes to see her. Do not disturb Miss Clare. You will be responsible, Lester, if anything should happen. I have done what I could."

"By all means."

The two remained without exchanging another word until Miss Raymond came in, who, it was plain, had passed a night of watching. She did not look at Warden, but held out her hand warmly to Hugh.

"Come up-stairs," she said. "I thought you would never be here. She is better, and has not mentioned you: but I can see that she is longing for you. This is no time for pride. Come."

"But is it prudent——" began Warden.

Neither said a word, and they left the room together.

But Miss Clare did not by any means look like a

dying woman when Hugh entered her room. On the contrary, her eyes were brighter and her colour warmer than they had been for many a long day. She was not even in bed, as he had expected to find her, but was sitting upright—she always sat upright—in an arm-chair.

It was altogether so different from what he had looked to find, that he paused for an instant upon the threshold of the room. And he felt the full influence of the awe in which he had always stood of her from his childhood, when he once more, after so long, found himself actually in her presence. Indeed the awe was increased: for, in spite of appearances, he could not but feel that he was also in the presence of approaching death.

But if there was no sign of death in her looks, so was there none in her voice. She spoke firmly, though with a constrained effort, as he went to her and took her hand.

“I thought you would come, Hugh.”

“You wished to see me, aunt, and so I came. I would have been here some hours ago, but——”

“I know. Never mind that. I suppose that you have been told I am dying: but I am not so fortunate. The blow that ought to have killed me is over long ago. I think it has numbed me, so that

I can now feel nothing more as I ought to feel. I have not brought you here, either, for what perhaps you might expect——”

“Aunt!”

“My dear,” she said to Miss Raymond, “will you leave us for a few minutes? I have something to say to Hugh——”

Alice left the room, and Miss Clare continued at once and abruptly,

“Hugh, when you disregarded my wishes, with your eyes open, there was nothing for me to do but to let you take the whole consequence of your folly. I had passed my word, and I was bound to keep it, be the consequences what they might: and you must have expected me to do so. I disinherited you at once, as you must have imagined. But it seems that I was wrong. You were not disinherited, for you never had anything to inherit.”

“Aunt, before you go on, tell me that though you punished me you still felt kindly towards me.”

“Does a mother ever feel unkindly to her child, however weak and undutiful? No, Hugh: I felt no more unkindly towards you then than I feel now—now, when I ask you to be once more my son.”

“Once more your son! You forgive me, then?”

“Wait. I do not forgive you, for there is nothing

to forgive. What was a gross *mésalliance*—forgive me, but you know what I think about it—what was a gross *mésalliance* on the part of the heir of Earl's Dene is but of little moment on the part of one with no fortune, and with his way in the world to make. I ask you to be my son, not my heir. Here is my will," she said, taking up a document that lay open beside her, "which I have had drawn up by Mr West this morning. I wish you to read it."

He read:—

"This is the last will and testament of me Anne Letitia only child of Richard Colvil Clare late of Earl's Dene in the County of — Esquire and of Letitia his wife both deceased and relict of Louis Maximilian Victor Marquis of Croisville in the Kingdom of France I give and bequeath——"

He looked up at her wonderingly: but she only signed to him to proceed.

Then followed bequests of personal property for the benefit of the poor of her own parish and of Denethorp, to the hospital at Redchester, to some old servants, to Mr White, her Denethorp solicitor, and to the vicar of her parish. Then followed a legacy of £10,000 to Hugh himself, and some jewellery to Alice Raymond. And then he read,—

"And with the exception of and subject to the said

bequests I give grant bequeath and devise absolutely to my only son Félix de Croisville otherwise called Félix Créville all the estate of which I am possessed at the time of my death whether real or personal of every kind whatsoever and I direct that he shall bear the name and arms of Clare together with and in addition to his own and I appoint the said George White Hugh Lester and Félix de Croisville executors of this my will."

Naturally Hugh was unable to utter a word. He could but stare at this strange document in blank amazement.

"It is all true, Hugh," she said even more suddenly and abruptly than she had spoken before—as though she had no time to say all that she wished to say, or as though she feared that her strength might fail her before she concluded—"When I accompanied your father and mother to Paris, I became acquainted with that Marquis de Croisville, of whom you have doubtless read and heard as a leading spirit among the politicians of that time—of the time of the Revolution. He was the very ideal of what my dreams were then—a noble, but a democrat—a gentleman, but a philosopher, as we used to call men of his ideas. I was to be to him another Madame Roland.

"We were together to become the apostles and

prophets of the religion of liberty, first in France, and afterwards of the world. You have no doubt read of him as an ambitious man—and he was so. But that was no fault in my eyes. Well, I joined my life with his, and—need I say it?—without becoming a wife in any way that would be recognised by law. Do you understand me? It was the age of Reason, as we then called it—of blasphemous rebellion, as I call it now. I had one child, this Félix. Not that I named him so. I thought him lost: I thought he had perished with his father in that ravine in the Jura. You have read the fate of the Marquis de Croisville?”

“How in escaping to the frontier across the mountains with his wife he fell over a precipice?”

“That is a matter of history. But history knows none of the details, nor even do I. They are known to God alone: for I was ill and unconscious. When I awoke I was without either my husband or my child. Two men who found me there discovered the fate of the Marquis: and I could only suppose that he had carried the child with him to find for it a place of shelter. How I cursed the strength that had enabled me to survive that night!”

“And then?”

“The strength that kept me alive served me: it

enabled me to recognise the justice of God. I wished to die: but I vowed that if I lived, it should be to expiate, so far as I could, my sins of disobedience to my father, of rebellion against one whom God had anointed king, and of my contempt of all His laws. It was I who had tried my utmost to bring Him into contempt, and a whole nation into wickedness and misery: it was I who had destroyed my husband, and, as I thought, my child: it was I who—I know it too well—caused the death of my father: it was I who had brought disgrace upon a stainless name. I scarcely know how it was that I was saved. I made no effort to save myself, but daily declared myself once more a royalist and a Christian. I was carried first to Besançon and then to Paris, where I lay in prison, and as it were upon the very steps of the guillotine. Had the fall of Robespierre been but a day later, I should have mounted them in reality. I could not but believe that my vow had been heard.”

“And——”

“You know what my life has been since then. I remained with my father till he died, and I have always for his sake, and for that of all whom I had injured, kept my disgrace secret from the world. Since his death I have tried to do all for the cause

of order and of religion that a woman may: and in you, Hugh, I endeavoured to train one who would do for it all that may be done by a man. And then——”

Hugh bent his head with shame. It is a fearful and wonderful revelation when one whose life has been entirely upon the world's surface, who has but lived, and enjoyed, and loved, and suffered like other men, knowing no depths of passion or of sorrow deeper than it is given to most men to know, is suddenly admitted behind the scenes, and to secret depths which scarcely one eye in a million ever beholds. What had been his sorrow compared with her anguish—his disappointment with her despair? Beside her he felt immeasurably little. He understood her now: and he was borne down by a consciousness that, in the presence of a tragedy like hers, he ought to have found it as easy to sacrifice his love as for a child to give up a toy.

It was of course impossible that any of this could express itself in words. But his voice expressed much, though he only said, after a long pause,—

“So Félix Créville is your son?”

“In that sense. And he must not be made to suffer for his mother's sin—do you understand? Had I not sinned he would have been the heir to Earl's

Dene. But, Hugh, though I can do him justice, I cannot transfer to him the love of a mother that may be his of right, but that I had long since given away. And since I cannot transfer to him what I have given to you, that makes me all the more bound to do him justice."

"My dear mother!—I do indeed understand!"

"It is said that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation. But that has always seemed to me a hard saying: and it is not for a mother to knowingly make herself the instrument of God's justice upon her son. And it surely is not for me, the sinner, to make others suffer through my own sin."

Hugh meanwhile had knelt beside her and taken her hand.

"No," she went on, "it is you that must be my son while I live. And say no word to any one. Our name must not be stained by scandal: and when I am dead let my act of justice be considered an old woman's caprice. You will be able to say that you know the circumstances; and if you acquiesce, so must all who have less claim upon me than you."

"I will indeed, dearest mother! I threw up Earl's Dene for the sake of love and honour long ago; and

now I let it go willingly—gladly. But is it my part to be your son now? Has not Félix——”

“Yours only. Who can be so but you?”

“You do indeed forgive me, then? If I had only known——”

“And you will be content with my forgiveness and with my help while I live, and with nothing more?”

“More than content, dearest mother! And I will strive to be all that you would have me be. And Angélique——”

Her face grew hard again. “I once said that you must choose between Miss Lefort and Earl's Dene. Of course I cannot say now that you must choose between her and me. I must not come between the husband and the wife; but that is no reason why the wife should come between the mother and the son. It is but a poor sort of affection that needs constant companionship: and I must spend the rest of my days alone. To that I have made up my mind. But oh, Hugh, you cannot think it part of your duty to her to refuse to give me the comfort of the only affection for which I care? You will not, because I cannot reconcile myself to her, forbid me to help you to the best of my power to aid you in any career that you may choose—to let me hear of your success from

yourself? Surely, though they may be parted, a mother and a son may be in heart and in truth a mother and a son still?"

The hardness had departed both from her voice and from her eyes when she had finished. They even seemed to plead to him in a way that filled him with pity, and made him feel that henceforth their relation was to be reversed: that it was she who had to lean upon him, and not, as of old, he upon her.

"It shall be so indeed, mother," he answered quietly. "I never meant, much as I loved Angélique, to break myself from you."

"And now," she went on, "when I die—which must in the common course be before very long—I shall feel that I have done all that it has been permitted me to do. I shall leave London again on Friday. Come and see me to-morrow, and we will talk about your plans. Now I must rest. I never felt the need of rest before: perhaps the need may be the promise."

CHAPTER X.

WITHOUT again meeting either Miss Raymond or Warden, and bewildered by what he had heard and seen, Hugh at once returned straight to Angélique. It is certainly not strange that speculation as to the fate of Marie had a little passed out of the minds of both of them. Hers was filled by revived hopes of victory and vengeance: his by the history of Miss Clare—a history that, had he heard it from any other than herself, would have appeared incredible. A man who is young both in years and in nature does not look to find a life-tragedy in the career of an old lady who has apparently lived alone all her days, and has never, within the memory of a whole generation, been more than fifteen miles from home. He was by no means of a romantic or imaginative tendency: but what he had heard had set such springs of romance and of imagination as were his fairly open, and he had caught a full glimpse of a

real tragedy of human life such as he could otherwise never have conceived. He had at once been plunged to the very depths of sympathy. He could not only see but feel that her whole life, so outwardly tranquil, had been one of suffering incalculable, which had been by the very strength of the nature that had had to bear it rendered more incalculable still. Her very energy had drawn its sustenance, if not its birth, from suffering: and what had seemed the natural development of an active nature had turned out to have been but the unnatural effort of one that had been stifled prematurely. There had always been much real sympathy between these two: but now sympathy had subdued awe, and drew strength and depth from compassion for a soul that has had to bear its load in silence and alone. Of course it was now his main duty to assist her, with all his strength, in redeeming by what seemed to him as well as to her an obvious piece of justice, anything that touched the honour that was no less dear to him than to her. There was only one thing of which he was incapable. Filled as he was with pity and a sort of reflected remorse, it is still always a relief when secrets are over and barriers thrown down: and he was always incapable of observing the reserve of the eyes. His heart was lightened of a great load, and the expres-

sion of his face in consequence misled Angélique very considerably. What she read in it was the result of good news indeed, and she supposed that the news was good for her.

"Well?" she asked, anxiously.

"Thank God," he said, "we are friends again!"

"And how is she? Better, I trust?"

"I was led to expect to find her dying: but, on the contrary, I found her apparently well and strong."

Angélique's face fell, ever so little.

"And she has forgiven you?"

"I hope fully: and, my poor child, I hope, too, that your troubles are over now. How well you have borne them! so well that you have scarcely allowed me to feel unhappy about you, and for the life into which I led you."

"O Hugh, dearest, I am so very, very glad! Do not think about me—love makes up for all! I have cost you nothing, then, after all—not your aunt's affection—not even Earl's Dene!"

"Oh, as to that, Earl's Dene is gone; that was gone long ago. But what then? I shall be able to make a career now, and we shall be rich enough to be happy."

She looked at him blankly.

"What! Earl's Dene still gone?"

"Yes: my aunt showed me her will."

"And yet she has forgiven you? I do not understand."

Hugh, as must have been seen, was one of the most unsafe men in the world with whom to intrust a secret: for he was one of those whose confidences are his wife's also. If he had ever dreamed of keeping anything in the world from Angélique it was not likely that she would not have found it out in time: and in fact he never did dream of keeping anything from her. He read the prophecy literally, that "they twain shall be one flesh," and even extended it beyond its literal interpretation.

"Yes," he said, "in such a way that I cannot refuse such aid as she may still give me. But to Earl's Dene I have no claim. It is not you that have lost it to me, my darling: it must have gone from me anyhow."

"What! and you have seen her will? It is to be Miss Raymond's then?"

"No: not Miss Raymond's."

"Surely not Mark Warden's?"

"Warden's? Surely not. What put him into your head of all people in the world? what right would he have to come between me and my aunt?"

"And she has no relations but you?"

"So we thought; but we were mistaken. She has the nearest relation in the world—she has a son."

"A son? Miss Clare a son?"

"She herself did not know it till yesterday. It is a strange story—almost incredible. It is Félix Créville."

"Félix?—Félix Créville the son of Miss Clare? Are you laughing at me?"

"Laughing, Angélique? On the contrary, wonderful as it is, it is true. When she was a girl she was—privately married—to the Marquis de Croisville or Créville—there seems some confusion as to the name—who died in the French Revolution. This Félix Créville is their son."

"He? How should he be her son—a mere adventurer——"

"You may well wonder, but——"

"I do not believe it: it cannot be true. I have known Félix——"

"It is proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. A lawyer would be satisfied. There is proof and to spare."

"And you submit to such a monstrous imposition——"

"Angélique!"

"Yes—to such a monstrous imposition? You see her, she forgives you, and yet she leaves everything to an adventurer——"

Hugh looked at her amazed. But he was anything but clear-sighted where Angélique was concerned. "But his being an adventurer," he said, "does not prevent his being her son."

"But her real child? Her child in marriage?"

"But even then——"

"I see—and you submit to her leaving Earl's Dene to a bastard!"

"Angélique, it is I who do not understand. She has an entire right to dispose of her property just as she pleases, without any one interfering or complaining. My only claim to it depended upon her own will and pleasure, and, of course, I must resign any claim that I might fancy I had in favour of one who has a right to it beyond all living."

"And be content with barren forgiveness?"

"I should have been content with even so much as that. But did I not tell you——"

"And she has left you nothing?"

"Ten thousand pounds."

"That is nothing. It is not four hundred a-year."

"It is not very much, of course: but it is clear that the election could not have left her much to

leave without damaging the estate ; and then there is the chance of another contest, too. That she has done as much for me as she can do without wronging her heir I am as sure as that I stand here."

And he was right. Could Miss Clare have made her inclination square with what she considered to be her duty as mistress of Earl's Dene, Hugh would even yet have been a rich man. But, though she was not always just, she had at least the merit of never being just by halves, whatever might be the cost to her and hers.

But Angélique took a different view of the matter. "Four hundred a-year !" she repeated ; "and meanwhile ?"

"There are plenty of things—the army, for instance."

"The army !"

"Do you not like the idea ? Or there is the church—or there must be something or other."

O hunchbacked shadow, who every day, every hour, art returning to remind us of that world of beasts and birds in which every man finds his own likeness, every man his own story ! Thou didst not write fables, if a fable is but another word for a lie. The dog bearing the meat did not only cross the running stream of thy fancy, but is every moment

crossing the streams of all our lives, and grasping at the thousand shadows reflected in them as they flow.

It once happened that a youth was sent out by his good fairy into a ripe field of corn that was waiting for the harvest, and was told beforehand that his future good fortune should be in proportion to the number of corns borne by the single ear that he should pluck therein,—only he must pluck but once, and no more. By the gate through which he entered stood tall stalks that had borne an hundred-fold: but he saw how the red and golden field stretched before him, acre after acre, and he thought, surely there must be finer ears than these—peradventure I shall come to where the stalks have borne a thousand-fold. Then he went on till he came to where they had borne fifty-fold: and he thought, surely here must be a space of poor soil—I will tarry till I reach the taller stalks again. Then he went on till he came to where they had borne but ten-fold: and these he scorned. Then he came to where they grew in patches, bearing scarce two-fold: and at last, after passing by a few withered straws bearing perhaps a single mildewed grain, he went out as empty as when he went in.

And so would Angélique, had she but plucked her

first straw and held it fast, have been the lady of Earl's Dene after all : and it is by no means impossible that the memory of certain passages of the old time made her feel, now, that she would just as soon have been so under the name of Mrs Créville, as under that of Mrs Lester. But, as things were, to have to look forward to the day when she might take rank as the wife of a half-pay major as the summit of her hopes—it was simply intolerable. She guessed only too truly what Hugh meant by a career, whether in the army or elsewhere : and she had not by any means such belief in him as to believe him fit to do anything but live upon ten thousand a-year.

No wonder, therefore, that the poor girl lost her temper when she thought of the full, ripe ear of wheat that might have been hers. She must have done so sooner or later, and it had been long upon the ebb. And now unutterable contempt was added to her disappointment.

"*Grand Dieu !*" she exclaimed outright, with flashing eyes and at an incisive pitch of voice that is peculiar to agitated macaws and exasperated French-women—" *Grand Dieu*, that I should be tied for life to a fool !"

CHAPTER XI.

OF course there were plenty of rumours about Marie's disappearance, both in the profession and elsewhere, each and all of which were founded upon authority of the highest, and proof of the most irrefragable kind, to account for a step on her part which seemed altogether unaccountable. A successful artist does not throw up the prospect of a career such as hers promised to be for nothing, nor can a woman of flesh and blood suddenly disappear from the world in these unsupernatural times without a natural cause.

One rumour was—of course—that she had gone off to the Continent with a certain notorious *roué* and spendthrift: the evidence being that she had been seen dining at a hotel, at Dover, in his company, on the evening on which she had been due in Park Lane.

A second was — also of course — that her companion had not been the *roué* aforesaid, but a

married and intensely respectable man of high rank and great wealth, with whom she had been seen on board a steamer at Liverpool, at the same hour of the same evening.

A third, that the immaculate Marie had, on her way to a concert, been suddenly attacked in a hackney-coach by the pains of labour, and that she had retired into the country for a month, more or less : the evidence being positive assertion, and the number of the coach, which was said for certain to have been 8531.

A fourth, that she had run away to avoid a criminal charge, the nature of which was variously quoted as shop-lifting, swindling, forgery, arson, and murder — but more especially murder. There was overwhelming proof, supported by ample evidence of time and place, to prove each and all of these.

A fifth, that she was over head and ears, not in love, but in debt.

A sixth, that she had been claimed by a husband, who had just completed his term as a *forçat* at Brest, or, as others said, Toulon.

A seventh, that she was in the pay of the secret police of Paris—or, according to others, of the *bureau des affaires étrangères*, and, having completed her mission in England, had been recalled.

An eighth, that she had been driven from the field in shame by the marvellous playing of the talented Miss Smith. This was believed in by the immediate friends of that young lady, but by no others, and was indeed stoutly denied by the immediate friends of the talented Miss Green.

A ninth, that her real name was not Marie Lefort, but the Princess Alexandrovna — something: that she had been implicated deeply in a conspiracy to assassinate the Czar, instigated thereto by her lover — of course she had a lover — who was a sub-lieutenant of hulans serving in the Caucasus: that, upon the plot having been discovered, she, after receiving eight hundred and ninety-seven lashes with the knout, had escaped from prison, and walked, dressed as a Polish Jew, from Moscow to Königsberg: that thence she had made her way, hidden in a cargo of timber, to London: that she had been recognised, in the course of a performance, by an *attaché* of the Russian Embassy, who had been an unsuccessful rival of the sub-lieutenant: that she had been seized while walking in Oxford Street, at dusk, by three men disguised as watchmen, but in reality *employés* of the Embassy: and that her piano must henceforth lighten the labours of the

miners of Tobolsk. This report, of course, bore its truth upon its face.

A tenth, that her disappearance was a dodge of Monsieur Prosper's.

Thus for nine days were the waters disturbed, and then the circling wavelets of which she had been the centre ceased, and she seemed to have sunk like a stone beneath the surface of the lake of life, and to have left no sign. Félix, aided by Monsieur Prosper, sought for traces diligently, but in vain. No corpse was discovered upon the piers of the bridges, or floating among the river craft: no hospital walls had witnessed the parting of her soul and body: no sail had carried her away from that England where she had been so unhappy. Most strange of all, in the case of one in whom thought for others was a habit unconquerable by any emotion short of despair, she had apparently deserted the orphans to whom she had devoted all the strength that she had not given to her husband and to her art. At last nothing was left to him who sought for her the most ardently but certain despair, tempered only by the hope of vengeance, even though the position of Warden was so far unassailable before the world.

Now it was all very well for Barton to be free

from confinement, and to be trying to negotiate loans for other people: but he was most sorely in need upon his own account. As to how it happened that, once being in confinement, he ever became free, or that, being free, it was ever worth the while of anybody to take his freedom from him, is only one of those daily and hourly mysteries in the life of such a man that can no more be solved than the great mystery of the universe itself. There are, as every one who is tolerably acquainted with great cities knows, hundreds of men who do not earn so much as the wages of a west-country labourer, and who yet somehow drift along, no one knows how, without being able to obtain a quarter of what are usually—but, in such cases, to all appearance falsely—considered the necessaries of life, such as meat and lodging, but existing upon what are usually considered its luxuries, such as, in one case, lavender gloves, in another cabs, in another tobacco, in another brandy. The mystery is certainly not rendered the less insoluble by others by reason of its being equally so by such men themselves: nor, seeing that this is not the history of Dick Barton, is there any need to attempt to solve it here.

It almost looks as though, for purposes of mere

existence, supposing mere existence to be worth having for its own sake, it is sufficient to live by Faith: by Faith, that is to say, in Accident. But sometimes even he who lives by Faith must think, and, like Barton himself, occasionally catch a confused and barren glimpse of his position. And now this believer of believers was sober by compulsion. There was absolutely no one left of whom to borrow half-a-crown. He was roofless, dinnerless, breakfastless, supperless, penniless, friendless, all at once: and brandyless into the bargain. His sole possessions were clothes which were not clothes, as his friend Euripides would have called them, his Horace, and his hunger. But perhaps what weighed most heavily upon him was his quarrel with the only real friend that he had in the world.

"Unlucky devil that I am," he said to himself, when his anger with Warden had cooled down, and the troubles of Hugh Lester had passed away from his mind, "that no one should ever take me up but to let me fall again—not even a French fiddler. Why in the name of the Fates and Furies was I ever born? I have never even got so much as five minutes' enjoyment out of this world that canting blockheads are always crying up as so beautiful. But I doubt if I'm alone in that, for that matter—

and so what is the good of trying? Man made to be happy—Bah! Man was born to eat thistles, and be soundly cudgelled, and be an ass. I have half a mind to put an end to the whole business altogether. But in this black-hole called England—not that I suppose it's blacker than any other hole called anything else—one can't even make so cheap a *quietus* as that without a fee. One can't hang one's self without rope, and rope costs something: and it might as well cost a thousand guineas as a penny to a vagabond like me." One might starve to death, it is true—but that, in my case, would not be suicide: it would be natural death with a vengeance. And, after all, I doubt if I should have the energy to do anything very deliberate without having my belly full—and a full belly means content with things even as they are. It is sand for the hunted ostrich. Well, it comes to this, I suppose, that I must live and see the farce played out. It can't be very long, I suppose. But what a preposterous joke it is that a man should have muscle and stomach and brains better than those of half the world put together, and yet at the age when he ought to be at his best, be starving here in the streets when idiots whom I could twist round my little finger and thrash with it afterwards are washing down ortolans with Tokay!

The world beautiful indeed! It is the masterpiece of Momus, the arch-joke of the devil's court-jester. But even so, I must be fit for something: and if the people had the spirit of a mouse, we should see. If I could but cry out, 'To the Barricades!' with any hope of an answer! I am almost tempted to give up the game and turn—respectable. But even for that it is too late now."

He had by this time walked on until he found himself in Lombard Street—a quarter as exciting to a man without a penny as Vanille ice to Tantalus.

"I remember once proposing to Félix to take to the road. Suppose I take to the city instead? One would get one's rope *gratis* then—there's no fee to the hangman—and I would make my last dying speech in Demosthenic Greek. It would be worth it, only for the joke's sake: I fancy it would puzzle even the Ordinary. By Jove, there's Prescott! Drink—beggary—crime: that's the regular *facilis descensus*, I believe. I've gone through the first, so I suppose it's time to try the second. Holloa, Prescott! good morning. How are stocks or funds, or consols or discount, or whatever you call it, to-day? And which is your present constellation—Taurus or Ursa Major?"

It was part of the banker's policy to be popular:

but he simply stared at his old instrument and passed him by. But Barton followed him.

"Can you lend me half-a-crown?" he went on. "I've got nothing but thousand-pound notes in my pocket, and I want change."

"You are an impudent blackguard," answered the banker, increasing his pace.

"You won't? Is that your gratitude? You're not going to stand for Denethorpe again, then? For I'm worth buying still, I can tell you—and all for the small price of half-a-crown. Remember Tarquin and the Sibyl."

"You are worth more than that to be rid of. There," said Prescott, tossing him a guinea, and turning into his bank, at the door of which they had now arrived. He did not wish it to be thought that he had been stung, and he liked to be contemptuously munificent.

"Now," said Barton to himself, when he was left alone with his new wealth, "I suppose I ought to have thrown it back in the fellow's face. But—*non olet*. And this time no one shall call me prodigal. I'm almost tempted to drill a hole in it and hang it to my watch-chain—if I had such a thing. A guinea is the true charm against evil after all. Who was it said that the definition of riches is the immediate

possession of five shillings? But yet, hang it all, what's a guinea? Any way I'll no longer sign myself *impransus*."

So he turned into a small tavern, from which, after a while, he emerged in a better humour with himself and with the world. But though he did not eat very much, his pennyworth of bread necessitated the consumption of an intolerable deal of something very much more potent than sack: so that a hole was made in his guinea of another kind from that which he had contemplated.

It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon. Not knowing what to do with himself he returned to his home in the streets.

It may be noted that when a man has even a shilling or two in his pocket, not to speak of fourteen and sixpence, and has no object for a walk, his steps invariably turn westward. From East to West is as inevitably the course of the smallest coin as of the sun itself. So he proceeded slowly and meditatively along Cheapside, Ludgate Hill, the Strand, Pall Mall, St James's Street, and Piccadilly, until he reached Park Lane. But he was a very long time in the process, for a reason that may be readily conjectured when it is said that on turning into a public-house to refresh himself he found that his guinea was a

thing of the past altogether. And so, in obedience to the law of nature, he bent his steps eastward again. For the course of the penniless man is from West to East as surely as that of the sun when it is on the right side of the world.

But he was tired with walking, and it was getting late: and it was growing dark also. He therefore, knowing from experience that it is well on a warm summer's night to choose a comfortable place for repose betimes, sought at once his favourite bench in St James's Park, and, finding it unoccupied, disposed himself to pass the night there as one of the numerous lodgers of that particular chamber of the *hôtel à la belle étoile*, as Félix would have called it. Nor, when the weather is fine and warm, as it was now, is such a lodging by any means to be despised. It is true that it is apt to grow a little chilly, if not a little damp, about a couple of hours before sunrise, and it is impossible to be altogether secure of privacy: but the air is sweet and pure—one is not tempted to oversleep one's self when the chorus of sparrows chirps its *aubade*—and, above all, there is nothing to pay.

So he laid himself down luxuriously on the hard bench, which was soft to his weary and accustomed limbs, and began to read his Horace, as one reads a

book that one knows by heart, by the light of the stars which looked down upon him and upon London, and seemed to assert that, in spite of both, the world is beautiful in some ways after all. He was disturbed by no nightly birds of prey, either male or female—for these, with the unerring instinct of their kind, single out their proper quarry with an infallible eye, and leave unmolested a fellow-vagabond. And, after a while, night and weariness, that bring consolation to all men, brought him as sound and as sweet a sleep as if he had not been Dick Barton.

For some five or six good hours he slept his usual dreamless sleep, unbroken by any drunken refrains of songs that from time to time passed by him, or by any others of the equally agreeable voices of the night, as nights are known in London. But at four o'clock he woke, with the sun streaming into his eyes, and was Dick Barton once more.

Those who have not seen it under the spell of sunrise may laugh: but it is a fact, nevertheless, that at that hour of a summer morning our hideous capital is simply one of the most beautiful of all cities. It then enjoys all, and more than all, the beauty of silence, of sunlight, of opal skies, of clear and sharply-marked outlines, and of fresh air that—until it is destroyed and blotted out by the foul

breath of crowds and of coal-fires—belongs to any other place that can be named. Beauty of streets and of buildings depends far less for its existence and for its perfection upon the skill of the architect than upon the sharpness and clearness of form given by the nature of the atmosphere, both around and above: and the atmosphere of an English morning is simply without a rival. And then London, seen in silence and in sunshine instead of in noise and in smoke, has, in addition, the beauty of pathos and of contrast also. Such a prospect is a passing revelation of the fact that, however deeply the outward form of nature may be buried by the hand of man, her soul is immortal after all, and of how she is able to transform even her grave into her throne when all her foes are asleep, and when none but they who love her or who need her are abroad.

Barton was one who needed her, if he did not love her. He drew a deep breath of renewed strength—one is not subject to “next mornings” after a night spent out of doors—as he looked across what by day is a duck-pond, but which then—in all soberness it is said—looked like a fairy lake where it lay half hidden by green leaves made clean and fresh by the dew that sparkled upon them like a rain of emeralds, to where the Abbey stood, not in

the dingy cloak of brown that it wears by day, but in a morning robe of clear grey just tinged with the reflection of the rosebud of dawn. Not a living creature, save the sparrows, was in sight: for he was a late riser for a tenant of that chamber whose roof is the sky and whose walls the air. He drew himself together, gave a long stretch, stood up, and shook himself like a dog making his toilette after he has uncurled himself from his straw.

And then he saw that he was not quite alone with the sparrows. There is no separation of the sexes in that hostelry of the poor: and his eye lighted upon a neighbouring bench upon which lay a woman who seemed likely to be a still later riser than he, and he turned to go, when the woman moved suddenly, and woke up with a deep sigh.

She passed both hands over her face, and then, seeing Barton, timidly shrank to a corner of the bench, and drew her shawl round her closely.

"Good morning," he said, seating himself at the opposite corner. "I did not know I had had so near a neighbour last night, or else perhaps—What time did you come to bed? I hope I didn't snore: I do sometimes, I believe."

"Sir," she said, in a sweet voice that struck him

as being not unfamiliar to him, "could you tell me——"

He looked her full in the face. "Impossible," he said to himself, "if anything were impossible." But she, whose eyes had hitherto been fixed upon the ground, now raised them to his suddenly.

"Well, possible or no," he continued to himself, "it is no business of mine. Every one has a right to do what he likes with his own. 'Could I tell you,' you were saying——"

Poverty is not the only guide to the resting-places of the poor. Barton might wonder at such a meeting, and even disbelieve his very eyes: but not those who have ever wandered about the streets with no purpose beyond a longing to flee from the wretchedness of soul that is their only guide. To such as these, times and places are all as one. They would lie down to sleep in a den of lions without a thought of fear—their home is everywhere but at home. She, more homeless than the most homeless there, must have wandered all night without heeding how or where. Barton, wanderer upon the face of the world of London as he was, might exercise some choice as to the time and place of his repose: but not she. Yet neither were so ill-chosen after all. Though even Una may not sleep

safely everywhere, yet he must have been armed with something more than the devil's courage who would have disturbed her when the big form of Dick Barton lay so few yards distant from her as to make her seem to be neither without a companion nor a protector. Truly our guardian angels take strange shapes sometimes!

But before he could finish his question she was gone.

He stood looking after her for some time, as though in doubt whether to follow her or no. "What is it to me?" he thought again. "No, I won't follow her." And so of course he did follow her, keeping her well in sight—which, as there was no crowd, was easy—but at the same time preserving a sufficient distance between himself and her so that she might not suspect she was being observed.

She went straight along the Mall till she reached Spring Gardens. Then she paused, and seemed in doubt as to which way she should turn, but finally took the direction of Westminster.

When the Abbey was again in sight she stopped once more. Then she went on again at a hurried pace, and, when opposite St Margaret's, turned suddenly to the left. Barton at once quickened his

pace, and gained upon her, till in a few seconds he was by her side.

"You were beginning to ask me a question just now," he said. "Can I be of any use to you?"

"No—you can be of no use to me."

"I think I can, though. I'm not going to preach—but do you think I don't know where you are going? It was only yesterday I thought of taking the same journey myself."

"Indeed——"

"Never mind now. It wouldn't have mattered a curse what had become of me: and I expect my cause was greater than yours, and so I had double reason. Yes, greater cause—I mean what I say, and I say it deliberately. Do you know what a wasted life means to a man who might have been anything he pleased? No doubt you will say that a broken heart means a great deal more—but that only shows how little you know about the matter."

"But——"

"You are trembling all over: and as if you had not had enough of the cold air you are going to try the cold—— Pshaw! what an ass I am. Put your shawl round you as closely as you can, and come with me."

"But what shall I do? where shall I go? why do you hinder me?"

She spoke as if she did not know what she was saying: and, whether from cold, or from fear, or from excitement, or from all three, she was indeed trembling like the bough of an aspen. He himself wrapped her shawl round her, awkwardly, but not ungently.

"As for why I hinder you, it is because I am an ass, I suppose. The river's the best bed for most of us, I fancy: and I should be wiser if instead of keeping you back from it I became your bedfellow. But one can always come to that at any time. Meanwhile, as to what you should do, I should say, come and get some breakfast; and as to where you should go, you had better go for the present with me. It strikes me that we are both pretty well outside playing at propriety; and I don't suppose that you'll be afraid of your companion? Besides, no one's up yet that you or I are likely to know."

As he had said, he could not preach: but he had made a sermon all the same.

"I will never say another word about this," he continued, "so you have nothing to fear. Only I will not apologise for having followed you. If you

will not let me help you, you must help me. So you see I am not so very unselfish in having gone after you two miles out of my way."

"I help you? I? *Mon Dieu!*"

"Yes—I'll tell you how, presently. And you needn't say a word about your story. I can see it all, and it's as old as the hills. But how a fellow like that——"

"He was always good to me."

"There's the woman all over! By God, you are enough to send one mad! Let the rascal—well, then, let the cad—go: you must see he's not fit to clean your shoes."

"But you do not——"

"Understand? But I do, though: perhaps more than you do yourself. I haven't been among men and women for nothing. Have you no friends?"

"Not one."

"Not Mrs Lester? Not Miss what's-her-name—Miss Raymond?"

"None."

"But is there no one left whom you can help—for whom you can live still? Not even a kitten? I know more about women—I, Dick Barton, who never cared for one of them and for whom not one of them ever cared, and who don't think them worth

caring about either—than Prosper, with all his brag. And you're just the girl to have a deaf great-grand-mother, or a blind canary, or a sixpenny doll, to work her fingers to the bone for."

Ernest and Fleurette! were the memories of you as fast asleep as your bodies that it needed Dick Barton to recall you to the mind of your sister—of your mother? But let it be remembered what is meant by despair—not sorrow merely, not even anguish, but the mad hopelessness that, when it comes, overwhelms even the strongest soul, and draws a black veil between heaven and the hearts of those of whom alone it has been written that they shall see God.

"Oh, I am too weak even to die!" she cried out; "what does anything matter—even life? Do with me what you will—take me where you please: only I am Marie Lefort no more. I will earn my children's bread: but for God's sake let the secret of my life be known to you only. Indeed I have cause to be dead to all who have known me."

"Poor child! I fear there is something outside the old story after all. So be it, then. I promise—on my word of honour, if I have anything left of that rather vague article. But say—are you afraid of me?"

"Of you? oh no: why should I be afraid of you?"

"Some people might think so. So be it, then. I had a sister once, who was lucky enough to be put underground before she was six years old, and for whom, I suppose, therefore, the gods entertained the whole of the very small amount of affection that they had to spare for me and mine. She was called Esther, I remember. Very well, then: you for to-day shall be Esther Barton—and for as many more days as you please."

CHAPTER XII.

It has been said that there was but one thing left for Félix to do. It was shortly this : and, if he has to any extent succeeded in obtaining the sympathy of the reader so far, it is much to be feared that he may run some risk of losing it now.

The literature of the duel is fast dying out. That duelling itself should have ceased to be an English institution may or may not be well : but, whether it be the one or the other, it is at any rate highly inconvenient. Its decadence has to a very great degree unmodernised the life of only fifty years ago, and made it in a very essential feature as unsympathetic to readers of the present day, who require, above all things, for their mental food the realism of their own daily life, and to exercise their imagination upon real tea-cups and real saucers of the most modern fashion, as a romance would be of which the scene should be laid in the Campus Martius, and in

the year of the city 753. The hair trigger has become as obsolete as the *pilum* or the *sica*. Not only in character, but in ideas and in conduct also, must our grandfathers be made to resemble their grandsons, in order to be made presentable in what one would think should be the cosmopolitan and cosmoeval society of literature : and, on the same principle as that on which the French painter dressed the guards of Dido in the uniform of the *mousquetaires du roi*, must we dress the neckclothed and padded dandy of fifty years since in the shooting-jacket of to-day. It is therefore an essential characteristic of the virtuous hero of a modern story that he should hold duelling either in abhorrence or in contempt, according as he is a good Christian or a good man of the world ; and it is, in fact, really hard to call to mind that the man who would now be considered a sensible fellow, would only half a century since have been called a coward, and cut dead by every man of honour. Had Félix lived in these days he would, doubtless, after having been smitten on the one cheek, have turned his other to the smiter in the most orthodox manner possible : and, as it was, this would doubtless have been the commendable course. What does a word signify, after all, that affords no ground for an action for damages ? If

fine words butter no parsnips, neither do hard words break any bones. It is a highly useful and sensible policy, that which is contained in the great principle of "It does not matter," and saves its disciples from scrapes innumerable. But, unfortunately for his credit, he did not live in these days: and, being quick-natured and sensitive, and having, perhaps owing to his social position, almost exaggerated notions of the duties, although he denied the rights, of gentle blood, he thought that an insult mattered a great deal. There is no such aristocrat in the whole world as the thorough-going republican who happens to have been born a gentleman: and though a marquis might be entitled to no privileges, a De Créville could never cease to be a De Créville, though his name might be ignored not only by the world, but by himself also.

After all, whatever people may think, no fact can be changed by any amount of change of view. Plenty of good men have fought duels, and yet have been no more murderers in their hearts—by which, and not by their deeds, it is to be presumed that men ought to be judged—than the most forgiving and meek-tempered of their race: and plenty have not only fought them, but have killed their man, without a thought that a gentleman, if not exactly a

Christian, should be ashamed to own. The tenderness for human life as such, and not because it is particularly worth having or keeping, which seems to have culminated in recognising in the body of the foulest murderer a holy temple not to be lightly meddled with by human hands, did not exist in days when even so purely arbitrary an institution as honour was held to be something better than human life. It is very lamentable, of course, that Félix lived in times that allowed him to behave as no one would be justified in behaving, now that the idea of moral courage is almost opposed to that of physical. He had not even the excuse of being forced into what he did by the pressure of public opinion: for, though in his own eyes there was now no course open to him but one, the world would certainly not have wasted a thought upon the matter.

But Félix was his own public opinion: and in due course Mark Warden received a challenge. How he took it may be imagined: he simply laughed it to scorn, and only sent back word that he should call in the assistance of the law if he found himself farther annoyed. In fact he only did what any sensible man in his position would have done, whether in those days or in these.

It was written, however, that the matter was not

to end here. The mass of circumstances, slight and apparently trivial in themselves, of which this story is composed, was gathering like a mass of snow, which is composed of the finest particles, but which, by gradual accretion, becomes an avalanche. If mountains are mothers of mice, it is from mole-hills that we must look for monsters. One passion only now filled the breast of Angélique. It was simply a wild passion for revenge—for revenge against Warden, against Félix, against Hugh, against Miss Clare—in short, against all the world. The last blow had been too cruel, and the remorse of self-interest only made matters worse a thousand-fold. She was enraged with herself for having been so befooled, and for having lost her temper when perhaps all else had not even yet been wholly lost: and, after her fashion, she vented her rage upon everybody but herself. She left her husband in his amaze, and hurried to the chambers of Mark Warden in the Temple. He was out, but she waited there till he returned, much to the excitement of the boy, who had never opened the door to a female visitor in his life before.

Warden himself was surprised to hear that a lady was waiting to see him, and that she would not give her name. He was still more surprised when he saw who the lady proved to be.

"Mr Warden," she began at once, without giving him her hand, "we have been bitter enemies. I know it now as well as you who have known yourself my enemy all along: and we shall be worse enemies still, perhaps, when we have to reckon about my poor Marie. Yes, you are her murderer, in one way or another. But we must be at peace now, though I hate you from my soul. Miss Clare has made her will."

"This is strange language, Mrs Lester. Do I understand that you are come to accuse me of the murder of—of your cousin? Do I look like a murderer—have I acted like one? I can pardon much to your grief, in which I also share; but——"

"Oh, you can look like what you please, except like what you are: and that is a —— But did I not say there must be peace between us now? If you are what I think you, there will be proof enough in time: and even if you choose to take my warning, you are a ruined man any way. No—I do not come to accuse you of anything: I come to tell you that Miss Clare has made her will."

"I know it."

"But do you know what it is?"

"Of course not—how should I? And if I did, I should respect her confidence."

"And you do not know who is her heir?"

"I certainly did not inquire. Your husband, I hope."

"No—her son."

"Her son?"

"Yes—Félix Créville."

And she told him the story as she heard it from Hugh.

When she had come to an end Warden was as pale as death.

"And why do you come to me?" he asked.

"Why? do you wish that Félix should have Earl's Dene? You are not the man I take you for if you can think of no means——"

"Thanks for your information: and thanks for letting me know your opinion of me. I am neither disappointed nor angry. Earl's Dene is nothing to me: and I can make any number of excuses for your anger under the circumstances. But I cannot help you, and I certainly can think of no means."

If he could, he would certainly not have taken her into his confidence.

"No means? No means to keep from the hands of another what you have been plotting and lusting for all your days? Are you a lawyer, and can you think of *no* means? Perhaps the will may be a bad one: perhaps——"

"You had better be careful, Mrs Lester; I am lawyer enough to tell you that. As I have said, I can understand your disappointment: but it seems to me that you are suggesting to me that I should commit a crime. Now, supposing that I were disposed to figure in a criminal court—which I certainly am not—I should prefer the crime to be for my own benefit."

"I said just now that I will fight you still: and so I will, to the end. But neither of us can conquer if this will is to stand. Between us, you certainly have the best of it. And yet can you be so tame as to——"

"What you call tameness, Mrs Lester, I call submission to ill fortune. And what interest have I, I should like to know, in Earl's Dene? I should like it to have gone to your husband, of course, but——"

"You are a greater hypocrite even than I took you for. But I am not altogether blind. You found me willing enough to take your hints once before, and I see that you are not unwilling to take mine now in return, however much you may try to throw dust in my eyes. Good morning."

"The woman must be mad," he said to himself when she had left him: and he really almost thought so. But what she had said had made him regard a

duel with Félix with somewhat different eyes than before.

"No, she is not mad," was his second, and therefore his best, thought. "I see it all. No—Earl's Dene is not gone, and must not go. I must not have worked all this time for nothing, though it has come to staking my life against success—though the question is reduced to that of a chance bullet between him and me."

His being possessed with one idea had given him the most dangerous quality of all: and in fact there are no men in the whole world more dangerous than men possessed by one idea. When put to it, they become as reckless of themselves as of others, like a mad Malay. He had not gone so far to draw in his horns now: and he now saw that the cunning brain must give place to the strong and ready hand. If he should fall—well, he was no coward, and fully ready to take all ordinary risks of the time.

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who fears to put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all,"

sings the soldier-minstrel of the cavaliers: and though the song is of noble things, it will apply to the ignoble also. Warden was confident in his fate,

and in his deserts as well. And the chances that such men should rise the winners are myriads to one. *Fortuna favet fortibus*—it is cowards and doubters who lose. He was neither. He had risen to the occasion, and felt that he had made it his own.

“MY DEAR ANDREWS,—Can you do me a very great favour? I have a disagreeable and rather delicate affair on hand just now, in which it is difficult to know how to act. I fear, however, that it must end seriously, and I very much wish for your advice in the matter. If you will give it me, let me know where I can see you to-day, and at what hour.—Yours most sincerely,

“M. WARDEN.

“MAJOR ANDREWS.”

“Mr Warden presents his compliments to Mons. Créville, and, on consideration, will be glad to receive any friend of Mons. C., with a view to a final arrangement of the misunderstanding between them. Mr W. will be found at his chambers, 7 Elm Court, Temple, during the whole of to-day.”

These he despatched forthwith, and then turned to Coke upon Littleton to pass the time while waiting for their effect.

The answer to the first soon arrived. It was merely as follows :—

“ MY DEAR WARDEN,—All right. Come and dine with me here at six o'clock. Such things are always best discussed over a bottle.—Yours very truly,

“ A. R. ANDREWS.

“ M. WARDEN, Esq.”

But in the matter of the second the delay was very much longer. The fact was that for the *soi-disant* Marquis de Créville to find a friend for such a purpose and in such a sense was no easy matter.

Prosper would certainly not do: nor, *a fortiori*, any of his orchestral *confrères*. It would be to cover the affair with ridicule.

But find one somewhere he must. At last, as a *pis-aller*, he bethought him of Dick Barton. Any way he was a graduate of Cambridge, and might therefore take brevet rank, as it were, in such a case.

This thought, however, scarcely diminished the difficulty. It was easy to think of Barton, but by no means so easy to find him, seeing that his address was something like “ Richard Barton, B.A., The Streets, London.”

CHAPTER XIII.

No time, however, had to be lost. So he went straight to the office of the 'Trumpet,' and inquired if anything had been seen or heard lately of the most errant of its contributors. He could scarcely be said to hope for success, and was almost surprised to learn that Barton had called there the very day before, and had given an address somewhere in Lambeth.

Lambeth was not a very likely quarter in which to look for a friend in an affair of honour. But there was no help for it: so he set out at once, and, after another series of difficulties, at last succeeded in discovering, not far from the Bishop's palace, No. 48 Saragossa Row, to which he had been referred.

He who invoked the

"Nymphs that reign o'er sewers and stinks"

could never have paid a visit to Saragossa Row, Lambeth, or he would never have libelled the city of

Johann Maria Farina. A whole flood of Cologne water would not have served for a sufficiently powerful baptism to regenerate Saragossa Row, of which the prevailing feature was an odour that would have defied the analysis of the most skilled of chemists, except so far that the most unscientific nose could trace in it a strong element of cabbage-water of a peculiarly outrageous kind. The shops that it contained were for the most part those of small butchers, grocers, and chandlers, redolent of short weight and adulteration; and this may have had something to do with the matter. Its inhabitants apparently consisted of troops of very small boys and girls, who, having rolled for pleasure in the mud-bank of the Thames, were in the habit of cleansing themselves in the gutter of their native street; and this, no doubt, had to do with the matter still more. At any rate, the three kingdoms of nature must have combined to produce the atmosphere in which Félix now found himself. But what words can describe a smell, whether of rose or of bilge water? Easier by far would it be to describe the hopeless poverty of the neighbourhood: its filth, of which the part that was unseen was worse, if possible, than the part which was seen: its hot and all-pervading dust, every mote of which must have been a seed of fever: its squalor,

and its despair. Saragossa Row exists no more. But its family has grown and multiplied a hundred-fold, and, baffling description, grows more prolific from year to year. Let those who need a description go and see for themselves. The sight will not prove uninformative, and they will not have to go far.

No. 48 proved to be the shop of a small dealer in *articles de luxe*—though not, indeed, made of *papier maché* and ormolu. The window was stocked with clay pipes, white mugs ornamented with blue letters, and blue mugs with white: penny song-books, and guides to dream-land: slices of plum-cake, and sticks of liquorice: lucifer-matches, and an old umbrella:—so that Dick Barton was lodged aristocratically indeed. The tenant was from home: but Félix, on making the old woman who reigned over this multifarious stock understand that he would write a note—probably a new idea to her altogether—was shown into his room, which was certainly a far worse lodging than the Mall, for the purpose of finding pen, ink, and paper, articles of too surpassing luxury to be contained even in the window.

The up-stairs room, appropriated to Dick Barton, was very much what might have been expected from the external surroundings. There was one unsteady table, that contrived to balance itself after a fashion

upon the carpetless floor: there were three chairs, of different orders of architecture, and of different ages: there was a corner cupboard, a broken poker, a dozen rat-holes,—and that was about all. The day was warm and close, but the window was closed: and, considering all things, so much the better. Félix looked round him in vain for writing materials. He did not know that people whose profession is literature in any of its forms never by any chance are the owners of a pen that will write, of ink that will run, or of a clean sheet of paper. Such things are *articles de luxe* indeed, that brand the amateur. But his search, though vain in this respect, was not without affording material for the exercise of curiosity.

The room, though grimed with the dust of ages, was free from the least suspicion of the dust of to-day. The table and the three chairs were ranged as symmetrically as they might be: and, wonder of wonders, there stood in a white and blue mug, apparently rejected from the stock for having lost its handle and a large piece out of one of the sides, a real purple hyacinth, which seemed to fill that one room, after what he had passed through on his way, with a breath from heaven, and with dreams of the fair face of nature, unmarred by such foul spots of leprosy as Saragossa Row.

Now, in all consistency, any room occupied by Dick Barton should have been inch-deep in dust and neck-deep in disorder, while the only odour at war with the foulness without should, at best, have been that of the stale fumes of departed spirits within. And as for a flower upon the mantel-piece, it was as much out of place as it would have been in his button-hole. It was clear, therefore, to Félix, than whom no one was better acquainted with all his ways, that he was not companionless in his new abode, and that his companion was a woman.

Of course, that such a thing should be was not in itself wonderful. But it was wonderful in Barton, who hated the whole sex, both in theory and practice, with a perfect hatred, tempered only by the sentiment of the scholar for Lesbia and Chlœe and Lalage. But to imagine him actually living with even Lesbia herself was as easy as to imagine him living without brandy. Like most men whose speech is exaggeratedly foul, his life, where women were concerned, was, from whatever cause, as pure as that of St Anthony himself, or rather purer, for he seemed beyond the pale even of temptation. But still all things are possible: and as he had, in the experience of Félix himself, been known to go five weeks without brandy, so he might, within the bounds of possi-

bility, have fallen into a sort of domesticity for five days or so. Perhaps it had suited some decayed or neglected beauty of the southern side to make a convenience even of Dick Barton: perhaps she had followed him for love—who could tell? For he possessed just that kind of strength that would have made many a foolish girl or woman follow him even there.

Félix was thus engaged in speculating upon the character of him whom, in spite of their quarrel, he knew to be his friend still, when he heard the well-known elephantine tread which slowly ascended the stairs like the statue of the *commendatore*, and an instant afterwards the big voice that belonged to it calling out,—

“Esther, are you in? By all that’s—Félix! No—she’s not in. Confound it all, though—Mrs Wood! If Miss Barton comes home, tell her I’m particularly engaged—do you understand?”

“Miss Barton?” asked Félix.

“Yes—my sister. Why shouldn’t I have a sister, like any other man?”

Félix held out his hand.

“I have been angry with you without cause, and very ungrateful. Will you forgive the anger of a man who had but just recovered from brain fever? For the sake of your own kindness to him?”

"Forgive! Not I. I'm only too glad to see you again. As for forgetting, that's another matter. The waste of good liquor is not a thing to be so easily forgotten: and yet if all the brandy that has been poured down my gullet had been poured into the gutter instead——"

"You remember the cause of our quarrel?"

"Of course I do. To think that you and I should quarrel about a woman! Félix, old fellow, I don't think I ever made an apology in my life, and so I don't exactly know how to begin. Much cause there is for me to forgive you! Mind, I don't think a bit better of women now than I did then. I still think them all——, every one of them. But there is one who is an angel."

"Yes, an angel in heaven," said Félix, sternly. "She is nothing more to you or to me. But there is a devil upon earth who is something to me still."

"I know who you mean, the canting scoundrel. What made you save him from the fire of that theatre? But no matter for that. He'll come to the fire at last, all in good time."

"Barton, I did not come to ask you to forgive me, or to talk about—her. On the very night that she disappeared I challenged Mark Warden, and he

refused to fight me, like a coward. To-day, however, I received this."

"He will fight you? Oh, how I envy you! If I only had him before me on a good smooth piece of hard ground, such as I used to know in Cumberland, I would soon see if I had forgotten how to try a fall! There should be none of your twelve paces—that's the number, isn't it?—between him and me. And I promise you his fall should be to the bottom of Styx: and I'd pitch my last *obolus* after him, to pay his passage, with all the pleasure in the world."

Here was promising material for a second! But Félix continued,—

"Will you go to him? You know what I mean. We must fight—not play at fighting. If I put a bullet through him the world is rid of a scoundrel: and if he through me—*tant mieux*."

Barton looked steadily at Félix, and sighed.

"I hate duels," he said. "I'm not a coward, I fancy: but what's the good of having thews and sinews if one doesn't use them? You call it chivalry, I suppose, to give up one's advantages: I call it folly: and you ask me to stand by and help Warden to shoot you—for I'd back the beast against a man like you, at twenty paces, twenty to one. I know you. You'd be as nervous as a tiger, and he'd

be as cool as the steadiest shot that ever brought a tiger down."

"You won't stand by me, then?"

"Stand by and see you shot? No."

"Then I must find some one else, that's all."

"Félix, don't be an ass. And yet——" He suddenly paused.

"Well?"

"Damn it, I can't tell you why. But you mustn't be the man to shoot Cram Warden, even supposing that he didn't shoot you. There are reasons—— I have it! *You* mustn't: but there's no reason why *I* shouldn't shoot him fifty times over—or if he shoots me, why, then, as you say, *tong mew*. What do you say? Shall I try my luck?"

"I wish you would be serious for once."

"And so I am—in sober seriousness."

"Of course I could not think of such a thing for a moment. Then you will not carry my message?"

"No, by God! not a fraction of it. I'm not a gentleman, and I don't pretend to be one. If you will fight, of course I can't help it. But——"

How Barton finished his sentence Félix never knew. Before he knew the cause he felt his heart beating violently: and though he turned mechanically towards the door, a kind of faintness prevented

his seeing anything but vacancy. His senses were acute enough ; but on this occasion his heart was quicker still.

It was Marie !

Of this alone he was conscious. All other facts vanished away into imperceptible nothingness—the place, the mystery of her disappearance, the strange companionship in which he found her again. The soul's love is in itself a dream : and in dreams, they say, one never feels surprise.

She herself stood in the doorway, without resolution either to advance or to retire. Indeed it would have been useless to retire, now that she had been seen by him from whom she had been seeking to fly. Barton, who had been speaking warmly, had not heard her step upon the stairs, which had indeed been too light to be heard by the ears of any but one. But he suddenly looked up, and saw what the reader has also seen.

He stopped abruptly, and there was silence for a full minute. Then he spoke again.

“ Esther—Miss Lefort—this is not my doing, though I am glad it has happened. Félix found me out, and——”

But he was unheard. Félix had broken from his dream, and was by her side. Barton looked at them

both once more, and sighed deeply, and then for a moment turned away.

"Marie, my own Marie!" exclaimed Félix at last: "heaven has sent me to you—nothing can part us now."

Would it have been wonderful if she also lost her sense of right and wrong—if she also had seen the hand of heaven in this chance meeting?

As it was, she could scarcely speak. "Oh my God!" she at last exclaimed, "am I never to find peace—never to be forgotten? And you—cannot you have mercy upon me?"

Their companion, whose presence both had forgotten, began to drum upon the window-pane. Then he turned round, and spoke.

"You seem to have got yourselves both into a mess—and I for one see no way out of it except by giving some one we know of ratsbane. But how about the duel now, Félix? Don't look so scared, Miss Lefort—I beg your pardon—Esther. That seems to me to be a worse mess still."

"Marie," said Félix, "it is true. I have challenged your husband, and he has accepted the challenge. That is what Barton means."

"I beg your pardon, that is not by any means what Barton means—at least not the whole of it.

I could scarcely have prevented your fighting before, without betraying confidence, but now——”

Félix certainly found himself in a horribly awkward position. To fight a duel with Marie's husband, she still living, was obviously impossible: it was equally impossible for him to betray her existence to him, which, since he had himself discovered it by accident, would amount to a breach of confidence: and to withdraw without sufficient reason would be to stamp himself as a coward, and to justify the opinion that Warden entertained of him as an impostor, when he had claimed to be of gentle blood.

Barton went on. “What do you say, Félix? You had better have accepted my offer—you know what I mean.”

“I see no way out of it but one,” he answered.

“And that is—I guess what you mean. Here are three poor devils—by Pluto! I think we had better subscribe for a few pennyworth of charcoal, after the fashion of your country. Besides, we should be doing a little good for once in our lives—the air of Lambeth smells feverish, and charcoal, they say, is a disinfectant.”

“Barton, I believe you would joke on the day of judgment.”

“My dear fellow, don't you know me yet? Laugh-

ing is my way of crying—that's all. If I were one of your lucky ones, I believe I should never make a joke again. It isn't your Mark Wardens that laugh—it's the shorn lamb that skips and plays, even when it sees the butcher. But what, then, is your one way?"

"My way at present leads away from you—but not in the way you mean. Good-bye, my friend, who have been a brother to me—be a brother to her also. Good-bye, Marie: you are right, we must part for ever. And do not fear for me, or for any one. I have loved you so dearly! Dearest, those who love as we do cannot part for ever. One day we shall meet again. Till then——"

But Marie threw herself into the doorway.

"No, Félix," she said, in a clear and firm voice, "you shall commit no sin for me. You are a brave man: you must not act like a coward."

Both started. It was not the Marie whom they had known that now spoke.

"It is I," she said, "who have brought about all this misery and all this sin. Yes, I mean it—it is I. And I will stand here until I am obeyed now, unless you choose to force your way by killing me first. I know the way you mean—it is to kill or to be killed—or both, perhaps. Will you listen to me?"

She paused, and then went on.

"In a good cause, I, the daughter of a French soldier, would not seek to keep back him I loved the best from certain death—or worse, from the certain shedding of the blood of another. But in a bad cause, I would rather that the whole world should call him coward than that I should have to think him weak or base. I vow, though I am a Christian woman, and though I have already seen death face to face, that your death, whether by your own hands or by those of my husband, or the death of my husband by yours, shall be my own. Nothing shall keep me from it—no, not Ernest or Fleurette. If you fear the world's scorn, do as I have done: the world is wide, and this one spot of it will no more miss Félix Créville than they have missed Marie Lefort. But I think better things of you than to think you would fear any scorn of men when undeserved. You will be strong in your own conscience; and there is one, at least, who the more you are scorned by those who do not know you will love you all the more. Yes—who will love you. There is no harm in saying so now. For my sake, let me have the consolation in my desolate life that he whom I love is a brave and a true man."

"Oh, Marie, how unworthy I am to dare to love

you! If you could share my fate—and why should you not? If we are both dead to the world——”

“That is impossible. You do not even tempt me. If I am in my heart to love a brave man, you must also love a pure woman. We must be worthy of one another. If you are brave and true for my sake, I must be true and pure for yours.”

“Then I am to revoke this challenge—I, a De Croisville? Marie—do you not understand that a man’s honour is his life?”

“Such honour as that? No. Once more, I have said it. It is not your life I wish to save—it is your true honour, and my own love.”

Félix bowed his eyes to the ground. The contest in him was bitter, but it could have but one ending.

“Curse it all!” said Barton, after a long pause. “I suppose it must be so: but—that that infernal scoundrel should get his own way after all!”

CHAPTER XIV.

AND so at last the curtain had fallen. It seems time formally to turn off the lights, to dismiss the audience, and to roll up the green carpet that used to be the outward symbol of a tragedy.

For although all the actors had remained alive at the close, it was a real tragedy that had been played. Two souls had found each other only to learn that their mutual recognition, which should by rights have made the common life of both, hitherto so wasted, whole and complete, meant the final certainty that their separate lives were to be wasted without hope until the end. To natures like theirs, untrained and undeadened by the ordinary experience of the world, longing for completeness and incomplete in themselves, this vain vision of what might have been is a very climax of tragedy. It may be that there are some who need no double soul : and if, as some hold, there is for each one of us

a double soul created somewhere in the world, it is very certain that it is given to very few to find theirs. To these—to those, that is to say, who need it not, and to those who do not know their need—the tragedy may seem to have but a tame *dénouement*. But those who have had the rare chance to meet with and to recognise that which has been created for them, whether in time or not in time, will not consider actual death essential to the idea of a tragic close. And yet there is something worse even than this.

Things are not to be measured by the space that they fill in the world, any more than lives are to be measured by the mere flux of hours and days. Every one of us is the centre of the world to himself: and it is his own illusions and hopes and memories—not outward facts—that form the real world of every one. Hugh Lester was as much the centre of the world as the greatest man who ever filled it with the greatest deeds: and his illusions were over. Nor was he one of those dreamers to whom illusion succeeds to illusion, and to whom, when one is dead, another is born. He had staked his whole happiness upon what he now suddenly waked to find the emptiest of dreams. Miss Clare had been right, after all. But life is not altogether like a stage.

Even when the play is played out, its lights are never turned off, its audience never dismissed, and its curtain never let fall. Other actors remained, besides Hugh, and Félix, and Marie, who still had something left to do.

Warden waited quietly in his chambers all day, as he had promised: but Félix never came, nor any message from him. Then he went according to his appointment to dine with his friend Major Andrews, and discussed the whole affair. Of course he gave his own version of the story, telling just as much—or rather just as little—of it as he pleased: so that the only question left open was whether he had acted rightly in admitting the claim of his opponent to be treated by him on equal terms. The Major certainly held that, considering the social position of the so-called Marquis—and, though he did not say so, of Warden also—the last resort of gentlemen would in such a case be rather a farce than a tragedy, in which he, for his own part, having regard to his own dignity and reputation, would rather not be an actor.

But he consented to go back with Warden to his chambers to see if anything had happened in the absence of the latter: and was much disappointed to find that a gentleman had called about half an

hour since, and was still waiting for Warden's return. But his brow cleared when, on accompanying Warden into the sitting-room, he saw Hugh Lester, with whom he had been slightly acquainted. If a man of his undoubted position and character was willing to act for Félix it gave the matter a different aspect, and made it possible for himself, with a good social conscience, to act for Warden.

Hugh was looking wretchedly pale and ill. He was the mere ghost of the young man who had held the reins from Redchester to Earl's Dene but a few months ago. He rose when Warden entered, but did not hold out his hand.

"Mr Warden," he said, coldly, "I daresay you are surprised to see me."

"I confess, Lester—but I am glad to see you, all the same. Won't you sit down again? Major Andrews—Mr Lester."

"We have met before, I think, Major—I have two matters that I have come about. In the first place——"

"Am I *de trop*?" asked the Major. "Because, if so——"

"Not at all. In the first place, there are stories going about about the disappearance of Miss Lefort."

"With which I am connected. I know it. I

presume you scarcely give credit to the crazy fancies of a mad French fiddler?"

"Pardon me—I will come to that presently. There is no evidence to connect you in any serious manner with her disappearance——"

"Thank you. I presume you mean that you do not think me a murderer. That is very kind of you."

"But, if she is not dead, you must see that it is to your interest to help in tracing her out."

"I would help to find the poor girl gladly. But what can I do?"

"Nothing, of course, if you know nothing. I would rather not explain myself more fully. But you know that Miss Raymond is an old friend of mine: and that than my aunt she has no nearer friends."

"My dear fellow, I do know nothing. And I do wish you would explain yourself."

"By all means, if you wish it. I hear that she—Miss Lefort, I mean—says she is married to you."

"She said so? And to whom, pray?"

"To Monsieur de Créville."

"That madman again! Lester, I think it more than strange that you should take his word against mine! You seem offended with me for some un-

known cause which I will not try to guess: but is that a reason for doubting the honour of one who has always tried to be your friend?"

"I have every reason to believe the word of Monsieur de Créville until it is disproved."

"And it is disproved, I hope, by my denial."

"Surely," said the Major.

"No one," Warden went on, "can prove a negative. It is for Monsieur Créville to prove his words—not for me."

"I am no match for you in logic," said Hugh. "But this I do say, that until the fate of Miss Lefort is discovered, I have quite enough reason, upon the authority of Monsieur de Créville, to do all I can to prevent Miss Raymond from making a fatal mistake."

"This is insufferable! Miss Raymond is her own mistress—though what she has to do with the matter I am at a loss to conceive."

"It was you who asked me for explanations—not I who offered them."

"And I feel honoured by them, I assure you. But as to this Créville. Has he only to say a thing to be believed?"

"Such a story as his at all events requires investigation."

"I tell you what, Lester—you have said enough to provoke any one who wishes you less well than I do. But I will not be provoked in this manner by you. I declare to you, on the honour of a gentleman, that I know nothing whatever about Miss Lefort more than all the world knows: and that this fellow Créville is either mad or lies. For my own part I believe the latter. He knows my opinion of him: and I am expecting a message from him even now."

"You expect a challenge from him?"

"I have already received one."

Here Major Andrews interrupted.

"Mr Lester," he said, "perhaps you can be of service here. I have been trying to persuade our friend Warden that he is in no way obliged—expected, I may say—to take notice of such a challenge."

Hugh was silent for a moment. Then he said,—

"I beg your pardon, Major. You know me well enough, I hope, to respect my opinion in such a matter?"

The Major shrugged his shoulders. "Well, you can scarcely have my experience," he replied.

"But I mean as to whether any friend of mine ought to be treated as a gentleman or no."

"Oh, certainly—of course."

"Then I so far vouch for Monsieur de Créville that a challenge from him ought to be as much considered as one from me or you."

"Indeed! And who, pray, is this mysterious Monsieur Créville?"

"I know, absolutely, that he is what he claims to be: that in spite of his position he is of as good birth as any of us here, probably of better. You have heard of the Marquis de Créville of the French Revolution? This is his son."

It was now Warden who interrupted.

"The bastard son, you mean," he said, contemptuously. "Not, of course, that that makes any difference in this affair."

The blood rushed to Lester's face at once. Angélique had said the very same thing: and that no doubt made him fire up all the more now.

"Warden," he said, warmly, "heaven knows what you mean in what you are doing, or how it is that you know as much as you appear to know. But in what you say I do understand what you mean—and, whatever has happened, I have a right to resent it."

"You are a strange fellow. My meaning is perfectly clear."

"Only too clear. And——"

"You cannot say that I speak without reason."

"I can, and I do."

It was the first lie that Hugh had told in his life, but he told it boldly.

Warden was about to reply, when a note was brought to him by his boy.

"Excuse me," he said, as he opened it. He read it deliberately, and then handed it to Hugh.

"Read this," he said. "You will scarcely now vouch for your friend's courage, if you can for his legitimacy. For my part, I have always, when a man has claimed to be the son of a gentleman but acted like a cur, believed his deeds rather than his words. '*Bon chat chasse de race.*'—You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

Hugh read,—

"Owing to circumstances which it is impossible to explain, M. de Croisville begs to inform Mr Warden that he feels himself bound to withdraw his offer of a meeting between them, and will henceforth not trouble Mr Warden with any farther correspondence on the subject."

He stared in angry amazement: and no wonder.

"What do you think of your friend now?" asked Warden, as he took the note from his hands and gave it to the Major.

"I'll tell you what *I* think," said the latter. "The fiddler has thought discretion the better part of valour—and so far he has proved himself a wiser man than you!"

But, amazed and angry as Hugh might be, however recreant to his birth his cousin might prove, it was not for him to let the family honour, that now seemed to have been driven back into its last stronghold, die altogether without a last struggle.

"Major," he said, "you evidently know nothing whatever of the matter, or you would speak differently. I will still answer for Monsieur de Créville as a gentleman and as a man of honour, in spite of all appearances."

"I hope so," said Major Andrews. "But, meanwhile, I have a sort of habit of judging by what I see."

"Indeed?" asked Warden. "A gentleman and a man of honour insults me in a room full of ladies, threatens me, bullies me into fighting, and then, at the last moment, sneaks off without an apology!"

"Warden," Hugh answered, "you know, quite as well as I do, that we are not speaking about what we seem to speak. I can see that you know more than I should have supposed: and you must see that it is not the honour of Monsieur de Créville that is

in question, but the honour of——” “Miss Clare,” he should have added, but stopped short.

“I have heard something strange, certainly — so strange that you must be out of your senses to speak as you do. Do you, Miss Clare’s own nephew, her nearest relation, her probable heir, seriously mean to say that you, of all people in the world, hold this fiddler, as the Major calls him, to be anything but an impostor?”

“What has that to do with it? I mean to say that I, Hugh Lester, am so convinced that Monsieur de Créville is no impostor that I am convinced that he can be no coward and no liar either.”

“Major,” said Warden, “do you hear?”

“Perfectly. Mr Lester has put a clear alternative, so far as I understand the matter—which I confess I don’t altogether. But it seems to me that he means that either the fiddler lies or——”

“No,” said Warden, interrupting him hastily, “I do not mean that.” He certainly did not intend to mix himself up in another affair from which he could derive no possible advantage, and with Lester, of all men. Not that he would have been sorry could Hugh also have been quietly put out of the way by some fortunate accident.

“Nor did I,” said Hugh, quietly. “But what I

wish to say is this, Major. I speak to you as Warden's friend, and I hope not otherwise than as mine. There is far more in this matter than you or any third person can possibly be aware of: and I am sorry that it is quite impossible for me to explain it to you or to any one. Warden knows what I mean, and that is enough. I consider that he has said what ought, in the opinion of any man of honour, to oblige me, if Monsieur Créville, for good reasons of his own, refuses to fight, to take his place, unless Mr Warden makes a full and satisfactory apology to him and to myself."

"Good God!" exclaimed Warden: "I apologise to you for having been insulted by M. de Créville?"

"In the name of the devil—this is the most complicated business I ever saw!" exclaimed the Major. "Surely——"

"No," replied Hugh to Warden, "that is mere quibbling. You know what I mean as well as I know it myself."

"You mean that you feel the honour of the Lesters insulted when I call this fellow a bastard? If so——"

"And do you apologise or no?"

"My dear fellow!"

"I am waiting."

"Do you mean to say——"

"Do you apologise or no?"

"Just think — how can I? I appeal to you, Major."

"Then all I can say is that you must consider me a substitute for Monsieur de Créville. You will hear from me again, unless I hear from you in the course of to-morrow. Good evening."

CHAPTER XV.

HUGH was stung to the very heart. He had already fancied that he had lost his last illusion. But now he found that yet one more had been left to go, and that that also was now gone. The dream that he was loved even as he loved had gone : and that of itself was bitter enough to bear. He had always more or less wondered, after the manner of such men as he, who are ready to give all things but who claim nothing that is not strictly their due, how it could be that so divine a being as Angélique, who only wanted wings to be a real angel, should have condescended from her native sky to one who felt himself to be so much below her in all things—in mind, in courage, and in self-sacrifice : and yet, now that his wonder had become justified, and the angel had actually found her wings and flown away, the waking from his dream was no less sudden and no less harsh. Still the death of love need not mean the death of faith in all that

remains, at least in a healthy nature, to which its own self is not the whole world. But then, in that interview with Miss Clare had taken place, not the mere waking from a dream, but the sudden and violent uprooting of all the beliefs and associations of his whole life—of what are far more to a man than his body or his brain. What a lie and a mockery the world must be if the life of her who had always seemed to him so consistent, so strong, so complete in herself, so entirely real in all that she seemed—*tota, teres atque rotunda*—had been, after all, as inconsistent, as weak, as incomplete, as unreal, as hollow as he had fancied it the reverse! And where, too, as illustrated in the person of Warden, were gratitude and the friendship of man for man—the most perfect human relation that can exist short of that perfect form of love that is so rare as scarcely to deserve to be taken practically into account? And where, in the person of Félix, was that which he himself, though of course unconsciously, set above love, friendship, and faith—the sense of private honour that, by making a man accountable to himself and to his own ideas of duty, renders him a gentleman? If all the rest had gone, he could still have believed in the natural nobility of blood: and now blood, even that which flowed in his own veins, had proved itself

to be no better than ditch-water. In a word, his whole creed was shattered: and though his own sense of duty remained—or he would have ceased to be Hugh Lester—it remained in truth only in the same way that a member of a persecuted religion, whom reason has rendered false to it in heart, clings to it still before the world simply because it happens to be down. Every woman might be false and unchaste, every man a coward: but the world must not be permitted to say, even with justice, that the Clares of Earl's Dene were no exceptions to the rule.

On that June day, which now seemed so long ago, on which he had travelled down to Earl's Dene in order to stand for Parliament, he had been a believer in all things—seeming and being had been the same. Now, friendship, love, and all the pleasantness of the world—and the world, to those who believe in it, can be very pleasant indeed—had passed from him, and had left life as poor, and as hard, and as barren to him as to Félix himself, whose whole career had consisted of a continual loss of illusion after illusion. Even his outward misfortunes, heavy as they had been, he had been able to bear with a brave, if not with a light heart, vexing himself far more for his wife's sake than for his own. But then he had been upheld by the power of a great love, for which he

had proved himself willing and able to sacrifice all other things, and by an intense belief in the glory of that gift of gentle blood of which no outward circumstances, however hostile, could deprive him. He must always be a gentleman by right of birth, even as he was the husband of the divinest woman in the universe by right of good fortune. It was not, of course, that he felt this consciously, but as a part of his very nature. But when Angélique had dealt her cruel blow—cruel to a degree that would have seemed inconceivable to her—blows had set in to rain apace, on the principle that it never rains but it pours.

In a word, his love had proved a dream that had passed, his friendship but a shadow that remained. His intense belief in Miss Clare as in a higher nature, had had to transform itself into compassion for a mere woman, frail and incomplete as others are : and now, what was blood, after all, when the very head of his own house, the only son of Miss Clare herself, had proved himself a coward?

But, even so, his faith fought hard. Even as the nature of Marie had a last citadel in its purity, as that of Félix in its love, so had that of Hugh a last citadel in his sense of duty. It was this sense of duty, apart from any claim of corresponding rights, that, from the beginning of this history, had always,

in all things that he had done, acted as the invisible worker of the machine: and it was this that, when the machine was shattered, was left visible among the fragments.

That, in the form which circumstances had compelled it to take, it was exaggerated, that it was distorted, that it was un-Christian, if you will, may be conceded. But the world has always conspired to honour it all the same. Whatever men may say, the man who acts, though blindly, upon principle, however false the principle upon which he acts in itself may be, has always been held to merit well: and while there is no need to impute to Hugh Lester any extraordinary merit—he himself would have been the last to understand any such imputation—it is not for those who, like most of us, are made in far too complex a fashion to be capable of acting, at least consistently, upon any principle at all, to throw stones. It is not, at least, for those who are incapable of following his example, to return a verdict of *felo de se* against the suicide of Utica. Rather we must allow that the world, as well as the Church, has a “noble army of martyrs” of its own.

Hugh was one who would have stabbed himself like Cato, and plunged into the gulf like Curtius. But he was not a philosopher: he only felt and

acted. And it was his duty now—at least so it seemed to him—in the faith of his own dead belief in all other things, to take upon himself to maintain before the world the truth of that in which he had himself ceased to believe. The day of Earl's Dene was over, but it must not set in disgrace : and if its heir showed himself unworthy, it must be for himself to shield such unworthiness from all other eyes. The day was at hand when Félix Créville would find himself master of Earl's Dene : and, as it seemed likely, would also find himself, at the same time, unable to hold up his head among men of honour. Félix must reap the reward : but it must be for Hugh to bear the burden and the heat of the day.

The wisdom of all this is another matter. But, wise or not wise, he was at all events a real man, of an uncomplex and straightforward nature, who was what he was, and could only act in one way. With the addition of brains, it is such men alone by whom the greatest things are done : and it was not his own fault that he had not yet had time to acquire the good sense of experience, or that he had not been born with the genius that more than supplies the place of it.

In bitterness of spirit, not for himself, but for

others—in the very throws of the acquisition of the experience that he needed—he was slowly returning to the home from which he felt only too bitterly that the light had vanished for ever, with his eyes cast down in shame for the new disgrace that, in his opinion, had fallen upon his name, and scarcely seeing where he was going, when he ran full against a man who was blind to his road for an exactly opposite reason—for the reason that he was walking along at full speed, with his eyes fixed, not upon the spot of vacancy that lies upon the ground, but upon that which lies a thousand leagues away. Each begged the other's pardon simultaneously, and the latter was proceeding on his way, when Hugh, who was easily roused from a reverie by any outward circumstance, however slight, and had looked up, suddenly said,—

“I beg your pardon, sir—are you not Monsieur Créville?”

“That is my name, certainly.”

“I thought so. I am Mr Lester—you know my name, no doubt. Would you let me walk on with you? I have something to say to you.”

“Mr Lester?” asked the other, with a bow; “I ought to have recognised you. I am in a hurry—but——”

"I should be really obliged," Hugh interrupted him, with a coldness that was intended to be polite, but was in reality anything but what he intended.

"Could you say it to me now?"

"I am sorry to delay you, if you have anything to do—but the matter is of the most pressing importance. I should have come to you if I had known where you lived."

"I am going home now. If it is not going out of your way, would you come in my direction? I am afraid I can offer you no hospitality, but——"

"Do not mention it," said Hugh. "That will be the best way—the street is not the best place for talking in. I will keep what I have to say till we arrive. You will be alone?"

"Quite alone."

The two young men, so nearly related, yet so different in every conceivable respect—in appearance, in history, in character, in tongue, in race, in all things, whether external or internal—walked on in silence, each absorbed in his own thoughts, till they reached the lodgings of Félix. It was late, and the household had retired, so that there was no fear of their being disturbed, for Félix was never troubled with visitors of the night-bird order. They had to grope their way up-stairs in the dark: and when

Félix struck a light, after a long search for matches, Hugh saw that the room in which he found himself was littered all over with the preparations that a careless man makes for a long journey.

"I can at all events offer you a chair," said Félix, in a tone of intense weariness. "You see that I am on the eve of a journey."

"You are leaving England?"

"For good."

Hugh had of course seen Félix before, but had never had occasion to observe him carefully, or even to notice him at all. Now, however, he looked at him with an interest that may be conceived.

He was no physiognomist, and he was prejudiced: so no wonder he was puzzled. The face that he saw was worn and weary, but it was calm, and grave, and resolute: the face of a man who had fought many a hard battle with life, and had lost, indeed, but lost with honour—not that of a man who feared to risk so small a thing as life now seemed to Hugh. Indeed, for that matter, it looked like the face of a man who would hold his life even more cheaply than he. But the foreign air and the general tone with which the artist-life stamps a man so indelibly and so unmistakably, confirmed him in his prejudice. Could this be the son of Miss Clare?

And yet it was plainly so. Strong emotion, like death itself, calls forth hidden resemblances that would otherwise never be suspected. Hugh had seen Miss Clare in the calm that follows mental suffering: and he was startled by a similarity of expression that made the very features seem the same.

Félix appeared to be in no hurry to learn the nature of Hugh's communication. He first of all sat down, and then, suddenly rising, lighted a cigar, and offered another to Hugh.

"They are not very good, I am afraid," he said: "but I can give you a pipe, if you prefer it. You are in Bohemia here, you know," he continued, with an attempt at a smile—the very smile that he had seen upon Miss Clare's lips when he had last parted from her.

Hugh found it difficult to begin what he had to say: and yet he was ashamed that he should be obliged to treat with courtesy one whom he held to be so little worthy to be treated even with ordinary respect.

"No, thank you," he said, coldly. "You know who I am? I am the nephew of Miss Clare. You know something of her?"

"I have seen her."

"I hear you have challenged Mr Warden to fight a duel?"

"Ah—you come on his part?"

"Not exactly, though I come from him. Am I right?"

"Perfectly. Why do you ask?"

"Because I hear that you have changed your mind."

"That is so also."

"To his great surprise. Have you any objection to let me know why?"

"Yes—the greatest."

"Suppose, then, that I am come on his part. He says that you insulted him publicly, that you forced a duel upon him, and that now, without giving any reason, you refuse to meet him. Is that true?"

"Quite true."

Certainly the previous astonishment of Hugh was nothing to his astonishment at this cool admission.

"You know," he asked, "what you will oblige people to think?"

"Certainly I do. But it will matter very little to me what people say of an obscure musician, or what they think either. I shall be out of reach."

"And you claim to be——"

"Excuse me—I claim to be nothing. Is that all you have to say?"

"You—the son of—of a French gentleman, will submit to be called——"

"A coward, you would say? Yes—if people choose to call me so."

Hugh looked at him as a specimen of some new species of animal. This was something more than the ordinary thick-hided cowardice of one who preferred his skin to his honour. If it had not been for his perfect and almost unreasonable confidence in Miss Clare he would have certainly been tempted to become a convert to the theories of Angélique and of Warden. But he could not allow the head of his house so to disgrace himself without one effort more.

"You will wonder," he said, "since such are your sentiments, why I, who certainly hold others, mix myself up in such an affair?"

"Not the least. You are a friend of Warden's, I suppose."

"And you will give no explanation?"

"I have none to give. I do not choose to fight—that is all."

"Or apologise?"

"That least of all."

"Mr Créville," said Hugh, "I do not come as a friend of Mr Warden. I come on my own account—to tell you simply that you *must* go on with this affair—or I. And that whether you are afraid or no."

Félix flushed up with a sudden anger—but it died away as soon as it came.

“Or you?” he asked, in involuntary surprise.

“Or I. It is your duty to carry this through—not for the sake of your own honour, for which it seems you do not very much care, but for the sake of that of others. In a very few years’ time—however long it may be——”

He paused, in doubt as to whether he should continue or no. Then he went on,—

“Yes, I must speak—it is necessary. Listen to me, and then withdraw your challenge if you please.”

Félix looked at him, but with little curiosity. He felt like one whose life is over, and who can never be surprised or interested again.

“There was once a lady,” began Hugh, “who lived her whole life long in a country neighbourhood doing good to those about her, and looked up to by the whole country round. She had been married very young, but circumstances had led her to retain her maiden name, and to let her marriage remain unknown. But that was from no fault of hers. Among other of her good deeds, she took up and warmly befriended a man of talent, who through her found a career. This man, however, for heaven

knows what end of his own, thought fit to slander his benefactress—to say, in fact, that her marriage had been no marriage, and that her only son—of whose existence she had till then been ignorant—was a bastard. Do you follow me?”

Félix felt his heart sink within him—certainly not from fear, but from a strange presentiment—strange beyond expression.

“What,” Hugh continued, “would be the plain duty of that son—how should he act, if not for his own sake, but for——”

“Explain yourself, for God’s sake,” exclaimed Félix. “Do you mean——” He rose suddenly from his seat, and his heart was beating rapidly.

“Surely not, even if the slander were as true as it is false, to sit down and let it go, as it needs must, forth to the world—surely not, having once challenged the slanderer, to admit its truth by withdrawing his challenge without explanation?”

“Monsieur?” cried Félix, heeding but one thing, “you know my mother?”

“Yes—at least I thought so till this strange conduct of yours made me refuse to think you any son of hers—any kinsman of mine.”

“And who is she, then? is it possible? *Grand Dieu!*——”

"Tell me first that you are her son."

"Ah, you may trust me—you may be at ease. But tell me——"

Hugh saw how his eyes flashed, how his calmness had changed into earnestness. In spite of all that passed, he saw with his own very eyes that the head of his house, whatever else he might be, was at all events no coward.

"You must have guessed already," he answered, "that I am speaking of my aunt, Miss Clare—of the Marchioness of Croisville."

"And she knows it? She knows——"

"Everything."

The face of Félix fell. "She is my mother—and she has not sent for me."

"She has but just learned it."

"You come from her, then?"

Hugh was embarrassed. He was satisfied: but he could not find it in his heart to tell this man, who he could see had been for a moment buoyed up by the instinctive hope that nature, who had denied him happiness, had of her own free will bestowed upon him something better still, that the new hope was as vain as the old.

Plenty of fine things have been said about the relation of mother and child—so many that there is

but little left to say. Seeing that its presence or its absence has been of necessity felt by every soul that has ever lived, there is, moreover, no reason why it should be discussed as a matter of psychology. It would be as reasonable as to talk truisms about hunger and thirst—the only other needs which, in their existence and in their phenomena, are common to all mankind. There is no one who requires to be taught anything new about any of these things, for there is no one who does not feel in his own person all that there is to say. But the highest praise that can be bestowed upon this relation is this, that its need and its power are felt most strongly by those who have never consciously known it, or who, having known it, have lost it. When it exists, it exists after the manner of the air, of which the presence, when it surrounds us, is scarcely regarded: when it does not exist, it is felt like the absence of air. Love is like some beautiful foreign atmosphere, of which every wave fills the soul that breathes it with new wonder at every breath: but the affection of the child for the mother is, in every sense—in the most metaphorical as well as in the most literal—the very air of home, which contains no elements of wonder, no strange revelations, which may even pall and weary, but which

fills him who is exiled from it with desires that are calm only because they are deep, because they belong to his very nature. And to him who, like Félix, has never known it at all, it is even more. It seems to be not only a part of his nature, as in the case of other men, but to be filled also with the unknown wonder that belongs to the passion of love itself. It is to him also home—but it is a home that he has never seen: it is as though he were some native of the south or of the east, with an imagination steeped in the beauty which belongs to him none the less because that beauty belongs not to his eyes—none the less because he has himself from his birth upwards been a sojourner in Thule, in it, but not of it. It becomes to him the blending of passion with calm affection, of actual excitement with the idea of perfect rest—an unknown land, full of the promise of all that the soul desires. He can know nothing of the evil that enters into every human relation, however perfect: on the contrary, he sees a heaven in what to those who have lived in it all their lives is often mere earth against which their souls not seldom rebel. It is when we are by the waters of Babylon that we sit down and weep over the thought of the Zion that has been or that ought to have been ours. To the actual dweller in

Palestine the land of his race doubtless appears dull and tame enough, with no greater gifts of honey or milk than belong to any other country in the world: but to him of the dispersion, whose bodily eyes have never seen it, however much his ears may have heard, it becomes, in the eyes of his imagination, a land flowing with milk and honey indeed.

And they who happen to know what to a Frenchman, above all other men in the world, is contained in the words "*ma mère*," will understand what Félix, this more than half Frenchman, felt when he found himself on the very border of the land which he had desired all the more for never having had even so much as its promise. The idea of all that to the Teutonic mind is contained in that "blessed Teutonic word, home," is to the Latin race contained in the no less blessed word "mother," whether they translate it into *madre* or *mère*: and to a good Catholic, as in faith, at least, was Félix, who prays not only to his heavenly Father but to his heavenly mother also, the idea of maternity has a significance greater still. Even Hugh, who was by no means of an imaginative turn, and who took things practically after his fashion, could not help for once being borne behind the scenes. He felt himself to be a usurper of what was not his own,

and that he was depriving Félix of far more than that of which Félix was depriving him. It was he who would in effect have been the loser if their respective conditions had been reversed, and if he, instead of Félix, had been declared the heir, and Félix, instead of himself, had been made the son.

Lost in this new idea, not the less strong because unconscious, Félix forgot all else for the moment. He did not even think of asking her history. What are past outside facts to present emotion? He would as soon have thought of asking the Holy Mother herself for her passport had she deigned to visit him in person.

"And where shall I find her?" he passionately asked: "when will she see me?"

"She has left London by now," Hugh answered: "she is gone home—down to Denethorp. But—well, we must be brothers also." All his doubt had vanished: the heart of Félix was to be read in his eyes. "I am her son too," he continued, with the warmth by which the heart which is conscious of having, though ignorantly, done a gross injustice seeks to repair it—"your younger brother. And so we must consult together. Before we think of ourselves we must think how to defend her. And, first of all, how comes it that you, you of all men—

a De Croisville, a Clare—should seem to be acting the part of—— There must be some good reason. I have never believed——”

His calmness, though rather of speech than of spirit, brought back Félix to the earth from the skies. It was too true—he would not face his mother, his father’s wife, until he had done what he could to defend her honour. Otherwise, he would come before her, not as her son, but as himself her slanderer, her accuser.

“That I am a coward, you would say? Well, if you had—but you are right. Yes—even she would absolve me now,” he continued to himself, though aloud,—“would hold that I risk my life in a good cause, such as even she would approve. And I shall have no difficulty in finding a second now?”

He held out his hand, which Hugh took gladly, and held for awhile without speaking. That silent grasp of the hand implied an unconscious compact, and went far to supply the place of the years of intimacy that should by rights have existed between the two sons of Miss Clare. One must not expect two young men, one of whom is rendered ashamed of showing emotion by his being an Englishman and the other by temperament, to fall into one

another's arms. It was enough that they understood one another in all really essential things, as even a French musician and republican and a young English country gentleman, with all the feelings of his order and of the era of Waterloo upon him, may do.

"Thanks!" replied Hugh at last, who was never given to express his emotions even in words. "I will return to Warden to-morrow: I will ask you not a single question more. I see that you have guessed her slanderer without my naming him. Are you a good shot?"

Félix shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you ever been out before?"

"Never."

"Well, then," said Hugh, with all the superior air of a man who has stood at his twelve paces over one who has never passed his baptism of fire, "I must tell you what to do. For the present we understand one another—that is enough for now. I will arrange everything. You will be here to-morrow?"

"Of course—all day. But do not be long. The sooner this is over the better. And if anything should happen——"

"Nonsense—nothing will happen—at least no-

thing that you mean. You will live happily all the rest of your days, as the story-books say." A strange look came into his eyes, which it was hard to read. "My dear fellow—brother, I ought to call you now—promise me one thing, will you? All sorts of accidents happen, you know—I mean to leave England shortly. When I do so, I rely upon your being to my—to our mother all that I ought to have been. And forgive me for having deprived you of your own for so long. You must not be jealous of me—I am far from having deserved what I have had. But you must deserve it—and that you will I feel sure."

He once more held out his hand.

"Leave England?" asked Félix. "Why?"

"Yes: do you not know—but what does it matter why? There are plenty of reasons, and I have always thought that a colonial life would suit me best. One's hands are good for something out there. At least they say so—any way mine do not seem good for much here. And—as I have no intention of returning immediately—do you promise?"

"With all my heart—whether you go or no."

"And you forgive me?"

"No—I thank you for having been to her what I

have not been able to be—what you must be to her still. But——”

He paused. Then, “I scarcely know how to say it,” he went on; “but, since you speak of emigrating——”

“Well? Is there anything strange in the idea?”

“To put it plainly—I know nothing of your laws—but I am doing you no injury?”

“Doing me an injury! How so?”

“I will not come between you and her in any way. I will be to her but one son the more. But it is you who are her eldest son, not I, who am now but just born. You shall not be poorer by me, either in affection, or in——”

“Oh,” interrupted Hugh, “that’s all right. You needn’t be afraid in that way.”

“You are quite sure?”

“I give you my word.”

“It is not because of me that you leave England?”

“Not the least in the world. Does my letting you know of your birth look like it? Do men run against their own interest like that?—And now, if you please, I will take a cigar.”

He smiled as he spoke. But the smile belied the

words—at least so it seemed to Félix. Then, with another cordial pressure of the hand, the two cousins, or rather brothers, bade each other good-night, and Hugh Lester once more went on his way. A load was off his mind, and he could once more breathe freely, although he had just told his second lie.

CHAPTER XVI.

So Hugh Lester was relieved in mind, so far as regarded the safety of the last citadel of his social creed. That was safe. But otherwise the complications that surrounded it, like the intrenchments of a besieging army, had only made the position of the garrison more insecure. In plainer words, his duty never to surrender while life still remained in him, was rendered a hundred times clearer to him than even before. He had been willing to fight for the honour of Earl's Dene, more dear to him by far than Earl's Dene itself, as a matter of duty when the spirit of loyalty had departed: now, the enthusiasm of loyalty had revived, and he was to do battle not only for the creed that he professed, but for his belief in his creed—for living persons as well as for dead ideas.

His motives, for one of his naturally straightforward nature, had become terribly complex: and

none the less so in that he made not the slightest attempt to unravel them. There is nothing so difficult as the attempt to put into words the opposing elements that direct the conduct of one who himself is incapable of self-analysis—of winnowing his own chaff from his own corn. Doubtless, to one who had loved so well and had lost, and worse than lost, so utterly, life did not seem particularly worth keeping; and therefore, in such a man, the risk of life for the sake of others is scarcely in itself particularly deserving of praise. But still the mere instinct of self-preservation, in a young and healthy man, is so strong by its very nature, that however worthless life itself may seem, the innate desire to retain it does not really, in practice, lose any of its real influence. It does not occur to men like Hugh Lester, strong in body and sound in mind, to actively court death because life has betrayed them. Disgust with life may indeed aid the spirit of self-sacrifice: but the spirit of self-sacrifice is none the less divine for being aided by a mere earthly influence. On the contrary, a touch of earth renders humanly pathetic what else were too divinely sublime.

Félix, then, had proved himself to be a true Clare: to be in no wise wanting in the sense of honour that, in his cousin's eyes, ought to be in-

separable from one who bore what to the latter was the very name of names. "*Non solum nomine Clarus*"—the motto over the iron gates of the lodge—expressed the very basis upon which any one who claimed to be a Clare should found his claim. Until he had so proved himself, it was necessary that he should be stung to the proof: but now that the proof was no longer needed, it was for Hugh to put himself to the proof still more. If the reader, as is possible, does not quite see the drift of all this, he must be content to wait for the explanation: for the conduct of men like Hugh Lester is to be explained by deeds, not words. Consciously, his whole feeling amounted to this: that it was for himself, not for Félix, to be the sacrifice, since a sacrifice seemed to be needed, to the honour of the name: and he excused himself—for what young man who is inclined to pride himself upon his common sense and freedom from sentimental nonsense will ever own even to himself that his motives savour of the heroic and of the unworldly?—on the ground that his own life had become worthless, and that it must not, under any circumstances, be open to the world to say that he had forced another into a duel in order that he might profit by his death.

And so he walked back to his home—or rather

to what had been his home: for the last words of his wife had turned it into a mere place in which to feed and sleep. She had gone to bed, and he, who would have remorselessly disturbed from the sweetest of dreams one whose thoughts he believed to be his thoughts, and whose interests, of the heart as well as of outer life, to be no other than his own, now, in a sort of pity for what he felt she must herself have suffered, would not even run the risk of waking one whose ways and thoughts could never even so much as seem to be his again—and which in reality had never been his at any time. He therefore, having just glanced at her, shading the light that he held in his hand that it might not break her sleep, lay down upon a sofa in their sitting-room to wait for his own share of slumber, and his own holiday of dreams. His rest, however, was not of long duration, though fatigue and excitement made it, while it lasted, deep and sound. The earliest morning light woke him with its cold: and then he rose once more and went again into the streets, one more wanderer to swell the number of those whom bankruptcy in happiness has rendered poor. He could not stay indoors and think out his thoughts deliberately within four walls; and the hour to act his thoughts had not yet arrived.

Angélique in her turn woke also: and, in the interval between dreaming and waking, missed her husband from her side. And now ensued a phenomenon which will certainly not seem to be the less strange because it happened to be true. It is not only in the hearts of women that what is strange is true, and that what is true is strange.

The reader, it is to be feared, was never so much in love with the heroine of the first book of this history as he ought to have been—as Félix, the inconstant, had once been, and as Hugh, the constant, in spite of all things, was still. It has already been said, in that same first book, that the charm of a beautiful woman is a thing not to be described: and accordingly she, like many another woman who wins hearts, may have provoked a little wonder at her success in two such diverse cases. Almost every woman who is gifted by nature with her kind of influence is a standing mystery to those who by circumstance or by good fortune do not fall within it: and verbal descriptions of those who are so gifted must necessarily appear as inconsistent with the actual effect of their magic upon men as the hideous pictures of the last queen of Scots with which art has favoured us are with the actual history of her whom they represent. But this is a

simple narrative of facts, not of theories : and that Angélique, who, poor girl, could neither hinder her heart from keeping all its warmth for its owner, nor her hands from grasping at the main chance, should gain the love of two men, is no more against fact, and experience, and nature, than that the face of Queen Mary, as we know it, should have gained that of scores. If the lover sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt, he may far more easily see in a stone that muscle which, for some arbitrary and traditional reason, has been accepted as the seat of the soul. But the fact is—and this is no mere truism, seeing that it is denied every day—that every woman is a woman after all. Though the reader may not have fallen in love with Angélique, he has gone very far astray indeed if in her he has admitted the possibility of there being such a thing as a wholly consistent woman, any more than, as his own experience will doubtless tell him, there is such a thing as a wholly consistent man. Consistency is a very phoenix, that exists wholly in fiction : and since it is wholly false to nature, it should not by rights be found even there.

And as every woman is a woman, neither more nor less, Angélique, in spite of her general superiority to her sex, was, being a woman, no exception

to this universal rule. She was no phoenix, though Félix and Hugh had thought her so.

Most assuredly she had spoken with her whole heart when she had called her husband a fool. What else could she think him? But there are fagots and fagots, and there are fools and fools. Insane, or rather idiotic, as his conduct had been in submitting to throw away his and her chances for a mere idea, when by playing his cards decently well he might have won every trick upon the board, still he had done what she would never have had either the strength or the courage to do: and strength and courage, even though they be exercised in folly, will have their weight even with the wise. The most sensible of women is bound to respect the most insane of men whose insanity comes from an innate power of will to do that which he ought, come what may. It is just those who have not any particular virtue that respect that particular virtue the most of all, on the same principle as that on which one of Lessing's heroines judged extravagance to be her lover's only fault, because economy was the only virtue that she had ever heard him praise. So it is the libertine who stands most in awe of the chaste nature for which he professes scorn and disbelief: and it is the weak woman,

strong only in impulse, who is most impressed by the sense of justice and of respect for the rights of others which belongs to and is the sign of a strong man. With all her contempt, with all the rebellion of her nature, Angélique unconsciously felt that she had found her master: and it may safely be said that she had never despised less than when she seemed most to despise. Even as it is womanliness—that is to say, to go to the root of the matter, purity of soul—and not outward beauty, that most attracts and subdues a man, so it is manliness—that is to say, not intellect, but courage and truth—that most subdues a woman.

Love in its fulness, which is nothing else than perfect sympathy, it may be that she was incapable of feeling: that is given but to very few men or women to feel: it is the privilege of souls that dwell in a far more ethereal atmosphere than that in which it is given to most of us, and not only to Angélique, to dwell. But of that sort of love that is felt, if such things feel, by the ivy for the tree round which it climbs, she, being woman, felt the need even as other women do, whether they are capable of the higher love or no. It may safely be said that she was capable of following the greatest villain upon earth through an ocean of villany so long as by strength

he showed himself her master : and she was capable of following her master, whenever he came, even though he showed the strength, not of evil, but of a nature of which her understanding could not conceive. And now she had not only found her master, but her instinct began to tell her, though not in words that she could hear, that it was so.

And so, when she found herself awake, she also, for the first time in her life, felt herself alone.

If so gross and prosaic a comparison—gross enough and prosaic enough to be worthy of Dick Barton himself—may be pardoned in speaking of so subtle and unprosaic a thing as woman's soul, then let it be said, in the face of bathos, that indulgence in violent passion is very like indulgence in brandy : it is the precursor of a terrible next morning—all the more terrible to those who are accustomed to the water of the cold springs of life for their daily beverage. Angélique had often had her fits of ill-humour, as Marie and her poor father had well known : but she had very rarely, if ever, been in a passion before. Her scene with Warden, in which she had certainly not been herself, returned to her in anything but pleasant colours to brighten the misty morning that filled the room : and she lay turning it over in her mind for a good half-hour, in the same way as, to

continue the comparison, a man, temperate by habit, turns over when he awakes, and strives self-tormentingly to recall the words that he spoke and the deeds that he did when wine betrayed him the night before. She would have given much to have been able to rise in the light of kind eyes, and to have been able to support herself upon a strong hand.

But she arose, as she awoke, to be alone—to touch no strong hand, to meet no kind eyes, and she missed them as careless eyes miss some piece of furniture from a room that they had never noticed while it was there—some flower from the table where it has been daily placed by careful but uncared-for hands. In such a case, the feeling of want goes very deep indeed—it becomes a feeling of desire. Unconsciously, she could not but feel, and therefore could not but be touched by, the devotion that had been hers—that might have been hers all her life long: a devotion not of weakness, not of a slave to a mistress, but of a husband to a wife. It was the waking of the instincts of the woman in her, which must have come about some time, even though they came late—even though she had begun her life, as it were, at the wrong end, and had to travel through it backwards.

And so at last she rose and dressed herself, with-

out the elaborate care that she had always been in the habit of expending upon her toilette even when there had been no eyes to see the result of her good taste in such matters, and the artistic skill with which, even when there was scarcely a crust for breakfast—as had sometimes happened—she could still come down to the crust as if she were the lady of a great country-house about to meet her guests over a breakfast *à l'Écossaise*. If her husband held a creed, she had held one also: it was first, above all things, “I believe in Angélique:” it was secondly, if even secondly, “I believe in Angélique as turned out by Madame Jupon.” But, on this occasion, she descended in a costume that was almost Bohemian in its negligence. Had Hugh been there to see, he would scarcely have believed but that the fairies, who change children at nurse, had for once taken it into their capricious heads to change a full-grown young woman. Her feeling, or rather her presentiment—for her reason by no means despaired—of failure in the great object of her life, and her sensation of loneliness when she most wished not to feel alone, had made all exertion, even the slight and habitual exertion of dressing herself becomingly in her own eyes, an impossibility. She almost felt anxiety itself: for Hugh, except when prevented by

the laws of his country and the will of his creditors, had never been absent from her without good cause and ample explanation. She felt sure that something must have happened out of the common: and, in her nervous condition, no news necessarily meant ill news. She at last, having sent away her breakfast uneaten, even had to confess to herself that she feared some misfortune, not to her plans, but to him whom she had hoped to make the instrument of them, and who had deceived her hopes so unpardonably. She did not recall her own words to Hugh: she did not feel the force of the bitter words "Too late:" she only felt a vague sense of evil that she was powerless to foresee or to prevent. Had Hugh himself been there, she would, without even a struggle on the part of her old self-sufficiency, have yielded her sceptre to him simply because she was a woman and he a man.

But, as it was, with all her weakness growing weaker still, and with all her need for the protection of love gaining strength hour by hour, she was doomed to wait. It was in truth too late: he for whose return she now almost longed did not return. Then came a terrible fear that her chains were broken. And yet he surely could not have left her for a foolish word, the very nature of which she had

herself forgotten—that she could not remember whether she had ever uttered or no? Surely the power that had gained so utterly could suffice to retain. In a word, jealousy had come to make even stronger her experience of what it means, not to be, but to feel, alone.

It was her own Nemesis, that, unless the Fates are exorable, must last not for a day, but for many days. The doom of Eve was upon her, that “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”

CHAPTER XVII.

FÉLIX also waited. As may well be imagined, the sleep that had come so soundly to Angélique, and so partially to Hugh, had not come in any form to him. He was in a state of nervous tension, in which it was impossible for him even to close his eyes. But though he did not dream, in the literal sense of the word, he dreamed waking dreams without number. He had the temperament which forms a perpetual link to unite the present with the past: and many things in his own nature that had often baffled the self-analysis to which he was so prone now became to him plain and clear. It seemed to him—though it was probably the result only of imagination setting in a particular direction—that he had some recollection of a beautiful and stately lady even before his first recollection of Aunt Cathon, or even of the vision of the clothes-lines from which he chose to date his birth. He tried to make his fancy

in this matter square with the old lady whom he had seen, but scarcely noticed, at the house in Park Lane, and even persuaded himself that he succeeded. This new story contained for him a romance such as he had never dreamed of even in the Angélique days: as for Marie—well, he dared not let his mind wander to her more than it insisted upon doing, whether he dared or no. That was a romance no more, but a fatal reality, that made him turn to the idea of his mother as the last refuge of a heart that had been forcibly turned back upon itself, and had failed hitherto in every effort to find what it desired. He had found his soul only to lose it for ever: but this new discovery seemed to his fancy, excited by the idea of what was unknown to him, as though it must needs prove a revelation to make, in some unknown way, the crooked places of his life straight, and its rough places plain.

As to the duel in which he found himself engaged after all, he was almost inclined to be grateful to fortune that had put it in his power to come to his mother not empty-handed, but as having been chosen above all other men to be the defender of her fame. It was of course no less out of the question that his should be the hand to take the life of the husband of Marie now than it had been yesterday. But it was

not necessary for him to take life: it was only necessary to risk his own, which was a very different matter. He had, as it were, only to suffer, not to do: and though suffering is in general harder than action, it was in his case a relief—it was a compromise in which every part of his duty seemed to meet, and to find mutual support. And so he positively longed impatiently for the entrance to his new life to open itself before him, though the janitor by whom the doors were to be thrown open came in the guise of death himself. Difference of nationality, too, doubtless had something to do with the matter. Hugh, the Englishman, did not court risk, even when risk was most indifferent to him: he simply accepted it, no more and no less than he would have accepted it had life been wholly a thing to be desired. But Félix, whose more nervous temperament might, were his life beautiful in his own eyes, have made him, not as a coward, but as a free chooser between good and evil, avoid death as “the terminator of delights and the separator of companions,” actually made him court danger, and made him, in truth, like one of his knightly ancestors to whom “the danger’s self were lure alone.”

But he, no less than his old mistress, waited also for the coming of Hugh in vain. Hour after hour

passed by as he wished and dreamed, but still the expected message did not come. At last the morning grew into the afternoon, the afternoon into the evening, and found him waiting still. For aught that the day had brought him, the history of the evening before might have been the story of a dream.

And yet—had not the history of his whole life been as the story of a dream—if not more in reality than the histories of all other men, yet more, at all events, in seeming? Might he, to whom art and love had themselves been mere dreams and nothing more, flatter his soul that what was as yet but a mere dream, by its very nature should turn out to be a reality? He was never a good hand at waiting, and at last his impatience fairly got the better of him. It was a mere chance that he did not set out either for Denethorp or for the Jura—at all events, that he did not cut the Gordian tangle in which all things seemed to have knotted themselves, by the flight, not of a coward from the field, but of a weary man from the world.

But as in all black humours, so in his—"fling but a stone, the giant dies." And, in truth, the sudden hammering upon his door, that roused him from the dreams that had begun in rose colour to end in sable when the sun had set, was literally like nothing less

than a shower of many stones. It was the signal of the arrival of Dick Barton, and of Dick Barton alone. An ordinary being is content, when he visits the lodgings of a friend, with a formal tap: but the Bohemian of Bohemians always advanced to a visit as if he were attacking the gate of a fortress with a battering-ram.

And Dick Barton it proved to be, though such a Dick Barton as would have astonished considerably his fellow-orators of Shoe Lane. His face, which generally seemed to be neither with nor without a beard, was cleanly shaven; and the soap that such an operation renders a matter of necessity for the chin, seemed to have extended to the very roots of his hair, which also shared in this remarkable piece of philistinism. That it had actually been brushed and combed would be perhaps too much to say: but it had plainly, though but in fancy, beheld the vision of a brush, and evolved, though but from its inner consciousness, the idea of a comb, like the German philosopher who, without ever having seen one, trusted to his inner soul to evolve the idea of a camel. His clothes also, which generally looked as if they had been put on thirty years ago, and left to take their chance ever since, were now sufficiently arranged to give their wearer the air of the patron of a country

dealer in second-hand garments : his coat seemed to be a marvellous specimen of misfit, not from carelessness, but from being worn by a man to whom a coat was a coat, and nothing more. And, besides all this, while one of his hands was dingy, to say the least of it, up to the very finger nails inclusive, the other, by its comparative redness, seemed to show that the griminess of its fellow was not, as there had hitherto been good reason to suppose, its natural hue. It was the phenomenon of the hyacinth over again. In fact, the transformation was so remarkable—for any inconsistent change, in the case of a man who is always in appearance the same, amounts to a transformation in the eyes of those who know him well—that some had been reminded of the fable of the lion in love, others of that of the spaniel and the ass. Some marvellous influence must have been at work to induce Dick Barton to pare his nails, and so far to imitate the arbitrary ways of fashion as to insert the proper button of his waistcoat in its proper hole. One rash member of the staff of the 'Trumpet,' who was celebrated for the happy style of his badinage, asked him that very morning if the Mrs B. that was to be was a brunette, that he in obedience to the law of contrast thought it his duty to become blonde : but he only answered by a growl that proclaimed

him to be the lion still, and by an anathema upon womankind at large that, it is to be hoped, proved him, in his judgment of them, to be the less noble quadruped after all.

Félix himself could not but be aware of some sort of change, though he judged rather from general effect than from details. In fact, to see in Barton even the most remote tendency to the externals of respectability, was sufficient to impress the least observant eyes.

"Well," said his visitor, with an unwonted air of having something to say, and yet of not being able to say it, "what's the last news with you? At all events, you're alive—that's something. Do you know why I came here? I wanted to try my hand at the penny-a-line business, and thought I might have come in for a coroner's inquest—and I don't even see an empty poison-bottle. And if you have been indulging in charcoal, why, all I can say is, that charcoal smells monstrously like tobacco. And so — Well, this is a world of disappointment, and it serves us right, into the bargain. What is your philosophy?"

Félix knew his old comrade too well not to know that the latter had been right when he said in effect, that he expressed by laughter very much what other

men would more consistently express by tears. And on this occasion the laughter was far too forced not to contradict itself: not to be as sorry as the jest that was supposed to give it rise.

"My dear Barton," said Félix, holding out his hand, "my philosophy is simply this—that, so far as my own experience goes, candles are a great deal more valuable than the stakes for which we play by the light of them. But I am also sure that, having once shared in the deal, we ought fairly to play our hand out, whether we hold good cards or no."

"The devil it is! I for one don't see any ought in the matter. On the contrary, it seems to me that we have to sit down, and play the game out, whether we will or no—whether the devil stands at our elbow to turn our common cards into trumps, like some people we know, or whether we are left to the help of our own unaided stupidity, like you and me. But what the deuce is the matter with you? You have grown as oracular as the Cumæan Sibyl, and as epigrammatic as myself."

"Do you remember——"

"Remember? Only too well. If I could get rid of this confounded memory of mine—— By the way, what do you think of women?"

"Of women?"

"Yes—of women. For my part, I think them enough to provoke a saint, let alone a devil. By all the gods and goddesses to boot, I *did* hope that Cram Warden would somehow get what he deserved, though I wouldn't be friendly enough to you to help the rascal send you to another and a better world. I call it better, simply because it isn't this world of ours: it couldn't be worse. Why, in the name of that quarter of the better world that men call hell, didn't you let me deal the cards in my own way? Any way, I would so far have dealt him what he deserved, that he, at least, should not escape whipping—to give a mild name to the soundest thrashing that was ever enjoyed by man."

"Barton," asked Félix, "can you be serious for a moment? You are my friend, I know: and now you are more my friend than ever."

"I should think so—if it had not been for me, there would have been a coroner's inquest after all. But can I be serious, you ask me? I haven't much cause to be anything else, I should fancy. "*Virtus laudatur et alget*"—half the Greek in England is to be found in Saragossa Row. I offered to pay for my dinner only yesterday with a Greek epigram, as good as any in the whole Anthology; and—would you believe it?—the cur of a waiter, instead of handing

me a hundred-pound note in change, demanded an additional fifteen-pence."

"Yes," continued Félix, not heeding his talk, which, more random than ever, as though, like the cuttle-fish concealing itself from its foes, he was striving to hide in a thick cloud of meaningless words some new feeling of which he was more than half ashamed. "You know in what way I mean. The brother of Marie is mine also. And now——"

"Bah! Because I advised a woman not to bathe in the Thames till the weather was warmer?"

"Is she with you still?"

"Yes—one can scarcely turn even so much as a woman out into Saragossa Row. Oh, you need not be jealous——" and he turned his face away suddenly with a sigh.

Félix looked up quickly. Could Barton also be a dreamer of dreams—could he, this incarnation of iambics and brandy—but the thought was too absurd.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he continued: "fancy Mrs Cram Warden turning out to be Miss Esther Barton. I am certainly well off for a brother-in-law—almost as well as he."

Félix looked at him again. Was the thought so absurd after all?

"I do not know what my fate may be," he went on: "I only know that it must be for ever apart from hers. I am denied the right of even obeying her. But come what may, she must not be left at least without some one to defend her rights—some one to shield her, so far as may be, from harm. When I left her yesterday—you know how—it was with an intention of burying myself from the world, but not so deeply but that I might still watch over her whom—— But now, even that is denied me. This may be the last time that you and I may ever meet. Let me, whatever happens, feel secure that you will be to her what I meant to be: I have no right to ask you, I know—but——"

"What—I? I who am not fit to take care of this carcass called Dick Barton—whom no man would trust to the extent of three pennyworth of gin? You trust Marie—Esther—to me?"

"Yes—to you."

"Then I say, yes, by God!"

He rose up at once from his chair, and tossed back his rough hair like a newly-wakened lion tossing back his mane. Félix could almost see a new strength bracing the limbs that nature had rendered so strong, as if in mockery to show how useless and ill bestowed her gifts may be.

But before he had time to reply, the door opened, and Hugh Lester entered hastily.

"I thought you would never come," said Félix.
"Is it settled? When is it to be?"

"It is all settled," Hugh answered, without observing the presence of Barton. "On Friday fortnight I meet Mark Warden on Calais sands."

"You?"

"Yes—I."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It may be thought that the position of Mark Warden had at last, after a prosperous course, become more than a little embarrassing—that, to speak more strongly, nothing was left to him but to throw up his cards, and to retire from the table as gracefully as a man who sees that luck is against him may. Good cards had certainly been dealt him at the opening deal, and he had as certainly played them well—perhaps, indeed, he had done even a little more than merely content himself with playing them well. But no one can foresee all things. His programme had been plain enough up to a certain point, and all things had hitherto proceeded strictly in accordance with it. He was on the best possible terms with Miss Raymond—he was rid of Marie without having been forced to resort to extreme means in order to be rid of her—he stood high in the good graces of Miss Clare—he was practically secure of his seat in Parlia-

ment, and Hugh had fallen altogether out of the field. But then had come in this unexpected complication in the person of Félix—a complication for which, even had he been a second Argus, he could not, any more than any one else, have been prepared. Even he, it will be thought, must begin to suspect that the proverbs with which he had on a former occasion sought to comfort his soul, and which set the will of man—at least of such men as are capable of forming a purpose, and of keeping to it when formed—above the might of all possible circumstances, were little better than mere epigrams after all, and as false as epigrams, always necessarily one-sided, must always be. But such a thought on the part of those who have taken the trouble to follow his career would wrong him terribly. That innate perseverance of his that made it always impossible for him to surrender a purpose once formed was not likely to change now: and a brain that can only keep cool needs no extraordinary fertility in resource in order to find the means of attaining any possible end. The change of immediate adversaries caused Warden surprise, but simply no embarrassment. Even the surprise did not last for long: he had long ago had good cause for writing down Hugh as the very prince of asses, on whose part any new piece

of folly could not be so extreme as to afford any matter for wonder on the part of a sane man.

"One story," says another proverb, "is always good till another is told." No doubt even Shylock would have a great deal to say for himself were he to be heard by his counsel at the bar of posterity, instead of being condemned off-hand on the *ex parte* statement of the advocate for Antonio. It is very possible that the latter was a great rascal, if the truth were known, and that Shylock was actuated by the best motives in the world. And so, to come down from illustrious to obscure examples, it is much to be feared that in the matter of this history also the judgment of the reader may have been delivered prematurely. There is no story in the world that cannot be told in at least two ways: and he has, so far, heard that of Earl's Dene told only in one. Now, therefore, in justice to all concerned in it, let him hear it told as, without a single change of incident, without a single modification of theory, it might have been told.

Miss Clare of Earl's Dene, then, a proud and obstinate old lady—but, like most proud and obstinate people, very easily deceived—had adopted her nephew, Hugh Lester by name, to be her heir in fact and her son in affection, and had devoted her life to

his welfare and happiness. She had brought him up with all the care and love of a mother: she had sent him into Parliament, and had found for him the very best of wives. But this young man, with a strange and fatal perversity, had shown himself in every respect unworthy of his good fortune and of her devotion. That he was destitute of brains was not his own fault: but he might at least have shown himself possessed of the most common gratitude. In the midst of an important election in which all things depended for their result upon his conduct and energy, he wasted his time and neglected his duty in a clandestine and unworthy love affair with a girl who afterwards made an ignominious failure on the stage: and, when it was accidentally discovered, was fool enough and ungrateful enough, though at the risk—as he well knew—of breaking the heart of his benefactress, and with the certainty of disappointing all her hopes, to take this girl with him to London, to secretly marry her, and, with her aid, to enter upon a career that was very like one of swindling, to say the least of it, not only in order to live, but to provide for his own and his wife's extravagance. Miss Clare, in spite of her affection for him, could not but cast him off: he was obliged to withdraw from his club, and was cut by all his

former acquaintance. At last, in spite of the skill of his wife and of himself in the noble art of living upon fictitious credit and upon money borrowed without the remotest prospect of ever repaying it, he fell into a state of complete destitution, and found himself the guest of an officer of the Sheriff of Middlesex. Driven to his last resources, he formed a design as ingenious as it was bold, and as bold as it was execrable.

Miss Clare, as it has been said, was of a credulous nature, and her life had not been quite so immaculate as was supposed. In her earlier life she had had a son whose loss in infancy was a matter of history. But his death, though it was notorious, had never been actually proved. So Hugh Lester got hold of a foreign adventurer from Paris, an old lover of his wife, also at his wit's end for a living, whom he induced to combine with him to carry out an atrocious fraud—nothing less than that this fellow, Félix Créville by name, whose surname by a happy coincidence had some resemblance to that of the father of the child, should personate that child, and so secure for himself, nominally for himself and for Hugh in reality, what the latter had justly forfeited, and what should by rights have passed to others. The scheme succeeded to admiration. Miss Clare

was not only credulous, but was even willing to be deceived : and so she made a will, leaving the whole of her estate to her supposed son. There was, however, one obstacle in the way of the conspirators in the person of a friend of the family who was too clear-sighted to be taken in by this impudent though plausible imposture. His name was Mark Warden : and he had already proved his disinterested friendship for Miss Clare and for her nephew also in a hundred ways. It was he who by his own indefatigable exertions, and without reward, had saved the election which Lester had tried his best to throw away : it was he who in a spirit of noble unselfishness had done all he could to prevent the ruinous and degrading *mésalliance* that rendered all his exertions in the election vain. But he who had shown himself capable of putting so abominable a fraud upon his mother, was not likely to have many scruples about ridding himself of his friend. It was necessary somehow to put the latter out of the way, though at the risk of his own life. He was no coward : on the contrary, he had already shown himself a willing duellist in addition to his other merits : so, with the aid of his accomplice, he forced a duel upon Warden, and——

Well, the result was yet to be known ; but what-

ever that result might be, this was the story, that, if Warden should survive the meeting, must needs go forth to the world, and, by a very little judicious management, become accepted by Miss Clare also. If, on the other hand, matters should take a contrary turn, his own conduct and character would still remain stainless—supposing that to be worth consideration in the case of a dead man. For Warden, who had been willing to risk all things upon the chance of a bullet, as between himself and Félix, was far more willing to risk all things upon the chances of the same game now that his opponent was far more important, and that victory would be victory indeed.

Not that he by any means intended to leave the event of the game entirely to be decided by Fortune. That had never been his way, nor was it now. Hitherto he had invariably treated her as his loyal servant, and he was not likely to accept her as his mistress in the very crisis of his success. Other things may be managed besides dice, and made friendly to the interest of the thrower: and a pistol may be loaded in more senses than one. Not that he was going to do anything unfair—was he not a man of honour and a gentleman? And besides, had he been neither, such a thing was out of the question.

But he knew himself, and he knew his opponent : and, as whist-players well know, a great deal may be done, when this is the case, without a single false shuffle of the cards. He, as a wise man, and therefore able to accept facts and look them well in the face, could not but see that the meeting between himself and Hugh would have to be final in the most extreme sense : that no more than one of the two must be permitted to leave the ground. And, as being something more than a wise man, he quite made up his mind that the one who was to be left upon the ground should not be he.

Of course he still ran some risk—that was inevitable : but he ran no more than he had already made up his mind to run. Even a blockhead may shoot as straight as a wise man : and, shot for shot, the blockhead was perhaps the more likely to shoot straight of the two. But Warden had his own views on this matter, and saw no reason to be afraid of his star. For the present it was necessary to make himself master of the situation in all its details—of the nature of Félix's claim, as to how far it was capable of proof, and of the extent—about which, however, he felt tolerably secure—to which he could count upon the heart of Miss Raymond.

First, of course, he relieved the mind of Major

Andrews by telling him of the new course that things had taken: that his opponent was one with whom a gentleman might, with a good social conscience, aid another gentleman to exchange shots. Indeed he now ventured to tell his own version of the story of Earl's Dene a little more fully, so that he might, in case occasion required, be provided with a favourable witness as to his own motives in the affair. The Major remained a little mystified still, and saw that there was more in the business than appeared: but there could be no doubt that the overt insults on either side were sufficient, without going below them, to afford an ample *casus belli*, and that it was high time for negotiations to cease, and for the pistol to be called in as arbiter. It is not necessary to enter into an analysis of the psychology of Major Andrews: it is sufficient to assume that Warden would not have chosen any man for his guide, philosopher, and friend who was not likely to guide, advise, and stand by him in whatever way he himself pleased.

After having finished this important piece of business by giving his friend *carte blanche* to keep within the letter of his instructions, to speak Hibernically, he considered what his next movement should be. He would have very much liked to be

able to see Miss Clare, in order to learn at headquarters what was the true position of things, or at all events what view was there taken of them. But with this duel hanging over him he felt that it was politic to absent himself for the present. So he contented himself with calling to inquire after her, and was not displeased to find that immediate communication with her was impossible, as she had just left town. He was a little put out by not having been officially informed of her departure, but this was too easily accountable for him to be rendered seriously anxious by it. Indeed he was in fact only too glad that she was out of the way: his constant presence at her house would now have been embarrassing to him, and he could not have broken it off without remark. So, as it was still early, he amused himself for an hour or so at a shooting gallery in the neighbourhood—he had not the art of killing time by lounging—and then, having satisfied himself that his eye and hand were in full accord, went to call upon Miss Raymond.

She was in, but she was not in—that is to say, she was reported as being not at home: but, when Warden asked leave to write a note to her, and gave his card, she, while he was writing, came into the room into which he had been shown.

CHAPTER XIX.

"So Miss Clare has left town, I find?" he asked, as he folded up his half-written note and put it into his pocket. "Is it not rather sudden? I hope she was well enough to undertake the journey?"

"Yes: she left on Friday—yesterday. Home is the best place for her now."

"She has had some great excitement, I am afraid, that was too much for her? I hope——"

"I hope, too, that all will be well again, now that she has forgiven Hugh."

"Then as to the cause of her illness—as to what else has happened—she has told you nothing?"

"Nothing. After Hugh left her she scarcely spoke a word."

"Not even to you? Well I too hope that all is well again between her and Hugh, with all my heart. But do you know that this very reconciliation has rather alarmed me?"

"Alarmed you?"

"Yes. You know Miss Clare: that she is justice and goodness itself: but that, like many people who are justice itself, she is not very apt to forgive?"

"I do not understand you. I should think that being ready to forgive was a part of justice. And what can we be more glad of than that she should be friends again with Hugh?"

"Nothing, of course. But you know what these sudden reconciliations are apt to mean with people like her. She was certainly very ill before she sent for Hugh: and there was no more reason for her forgiving him then than at any other time."

Miss Raymond looked alarmed. "You think there is real danger, then—that her illness is so serious?"

"That is what I meant. But her being able to take this long journey is certainly reassuring. Only—do you know of any other reason for her sending for him besides her being ill?"

"None."

"You are in her confidence: you would probably know if there were."

"I am aware of nothing more. Indeed she has told me nothing."

Warden drew a breath of relief. This ignorance

on her part made his course far more easy than he had even hoped to find it.

"My dear Miss Raymond," he said, "you have relieved my mind more than I can say. I was afraid of all sorts of mysteries: and, as you are no longer seriously anxious about Miss Clare—you who know her best—neither am I."

"She was so much better after seeing Hugh that I really think there is no cause for fear."

"This has been an anxious time for us all, however."

"Yes: and you have been such a true friend—you, with so much to think about besides."

"What could I think of but Miss Clare and you? I am glad you do me justice. Do you know, I was inclined to doubt it lately?"

"Why?"

"I thought—well, it does not matter. Hugh is an older friend than I am, after all."

"Poor fellow! Yes: but are you not now an old friend too?"

"I wish he would think so."

"And does he not?"

"You see men are not apt to think too justly of those who rise, however unwillingly, upon their fall. And I thought somehow, when I last met you—

when he came to you—that—it is so difficult to say—that, to speak plainly, I was treated as though, having shared your anxieties, I should be ill-pleased to share your happiness. There, I have made my confession, and am glad to find that it was not needed."

Miss Raymond blushed, for the complaint was not altogether without foundation. Somehow, though her reason and her inclination were on Warden's side, some instinct within her had certainly proved his enemy on the occasion to which he referred.

She held out her hand. "I am afraid we were thinking too much of ourselves," she said. "I know—Miss Clare must know—that there is no one so much entitled to share in her happiness as you."

"Thanks indeed!" he said, taking her hand and retaining it for an instant. "You are right in that. So they are really reconciled?"

"I hope so—indeed I am sure of it."

"In spite of that unhappy marriage?"

"If it is unhappy. Why should it be? Because Angélique was poor—because she was of lower rank than he? Must an unequal marriage always be an unhappy one?"

"God forbid! I called it unhappy because it had been the means of parting a mother and a son. But

you really think, then, that a marriage to be happy need not be equal?"

"Ah, I suppose you think me very unfashionable in my opinions?"

"It is always unfashionable to be right, I am afraid. For myself, I think——" he paused.

"Well?"

"That unfashionable marriages—those made in the teeth of the world—are generally the happiest ones. Do you think me very romantic for a lawyer?"

"Well—perhaps I do, a little! I was afraid you were going to laugh at me."

"Ah, a lawyer is not so unromantic a being as you may imagine. And perhaps he is the more apt to believe in romance even than other men, because he sees into the hidden depths of men's lives: because he sees below the surface that society has laid over them. It is boys and the inexperienced who laugh at Poetry: wise men know that it is poets after all who are the wisest of men."

Miss Raymond looked at him quickly. She felt that he was not altogether confining himself to an abstract question.

He saw her look, and said with studied abruptness,—

"Miss Raymond—your words have given me a strange hope."

She could not but guess what was coming. Indeed, for that matter she might have expected it long ago: and yet even now she had not made up her mind as to her answer. She could not trust her heart, which, though fond of freedom and not inclined to yield, was still far from being inclined to be cruel. And yet, though she felt embarrassed, she showed no outward sign that she even suspected what he was going to say. Girls like her have a marvellous power of self-control when they feel themselves to hold such a situation in their own hands, and to be able to surrender, to postpone the surrender, or not to surrender at all, just as they please. Angélique would have driven her lover at once to the point at which she intended him to arrive: Marie would have listened like a timid child: but Miss Raymond listened as all women but one in ten thousand would listen. She was excited, but outwardly composed: and she was equally prepared either to accept or to refuse.

"I wonder whether you guess what I mean?" he went on. "I have long dreamed, without daring to hope—how indeed could I dare?"—"I feel," he continued, after another moment, during which she

was silent, neither aiding him nor preventing his saying what he had to say, "that I am in no way your equal in the way that the world talks of equality. Whatever I may be now, whatever in time I hope to be, you are still Miss Raymond of New Court—a great lady, who might be still greater if she chose. You are beautiful, you are good, it is not only to me that you are the first of all women in the world. No—I do not know how to flatter. And I—well, I am a gentleman, I hope, but still a poor fellow who has to make his way by his own hands and brains. I have done something, even now: and I trust to do a great deal more. But in the course of things it must be years before I can become what the world would call the equal of Miss Raymond. How indeed should I ever be? I have hundreds of faults—no one can fight the world with its own weapons and not bear some marks of the conflict. But I am ambitious also—is that a fault in your eyes? And my ambition is to live a life that shall not be unworthy even of you. May your words, then, really give me hope: may I at least feel that in my battle with the world I am fighting not for myself but for you—that every battle draws me nearer to——"

He spoke with a seriousness that did admirable

duty for something more. She was still silent: but he felt that he had taken the right line so far. It was with an appearance of greater confidence that he continued,—

“I am not speaking wildly. Thank God, you at least are not bound by the laws of the world! Yes—I love you with all my soul. That, at least, makes me your equal in the highest way of all. I do not ask you to say to me now all that I trust one day to hear you say. But I do ask you to tell me to live.”

In spite of her old instinct, that refused to be allayed, she was strongly moved: for he had made love to her in the very way that was most calculated to move a girl with no nonsense about her. He had talked no nonsense: he had not raved: he had spoken like a man, earnestly and to the point. Moreover, he had claimed all due respect for himself, while he had yielded ample respect to her. He had also avoided the grand mistake of protesting disinterested motives—a course which always has the ring of self-accusation. The superiority that he had conceded to her was no more than the superiority which a man may always concede to a woman without prejudice to his claim to be her master. And as she really believed in his superiority, she was

really flattered by his concession : and she had lived too much and too invariably in an atmosphere of wealth to consciously regard it as a bar to her being loved for herself alone.

A woman is none the worse, however, for being on such occasions a little of a hypocrite. "Mr Warden," she said, drawing herself just a little farther from him—for he had imperceptibly advanced towards her—"I—you cannot tell how much you have taken me by surprise——"

"I hope not. Have you not seen——"

"That you cared for me, as a friend——"

"No more than that? No, I cannot think that my secret, though it has been silent, can have kept itself so closely——"

"You ask me, then, to tell you——"

"That you will be my heaven, to strive for with all my soul."

This time, the higher flight was not calculated to displease.

"But, indeed——"

"I cannot think that I have spoken to you too suddenly. I am content to wait—but not without so much hope as you can give me now."

"And if——"

"If you give me that hope? I promise, by all my

hope, to deserve it all. Only say that I am not quite nothing to you—that you are not displeased——”

“Displeased! It would be strange, indeed, if I were not proud. But——”

“But what?”

“It is so sudden!”

“I know that you must think me presumptuous——”

“Indeed I do not.”

“You give me that hope, then? If you but knew how I love you!——”

Her hesitation had really filled him with something like genuine warmth: but as his earnestness increased, so also did her hesitation. She was beginning to feel herself not quite so much mistress of the situation as she supposed. Indeed, if she had expected to play him and to land or not land him as she pleased, she found herself mistaken: and her reason and her generous instincts alike acted as his strong allies. Nothing would please her better than to bestow herself and New Court upon a strong man who would give as much as he received: and his being her social inferior was in harmony with her special form of romance. It must be remembered that all this occurred in days when English young ladies

acquired that reputation for sentiment which in these they appear to be trying so hard to lose. And so, in so far as she found her garrison somewhat rebellious to her command, she was not so much a hypocrite after all, when she pleaded that she had been taken by surprise.

"May I believe you?" she asked, in doubt—not of the answer, but of herself.

"I may hope, then?"

"This is all so strange!"

"Strange—that I love you?"

He began to feel that this trick also was won. "Only answer me now," he went on, "so far as you may. I know that it is time alone that can give me all that I long for. But with hope—with love——"

"Mr Warden—I cannot answer you now."

"Not even to tell me not to despair?"

"What man need ever despair?" she said at last. The final sentence had been wrung from her, but it had come: and that it was final she knew as well as he.

He certainly knew it: and he knew also that she would never fail her word: nor would he let the opportunity slip by. This time he came close to her, and took her hand.

"Dearest Alice—thanks!" he said, with that

assumption of triumph that goes far to bring about the triumph that it assumes, and with just enough warmth of manner to show that he knew what he had gained. "It will now be the work of my whole life to make myself worthy of being the happiest man on earth. I need press you no more at present—it is enough that you know me to be yours for ever. When shall I see you again? To-morrow? But it must be soon, for I shall have to leave London for a few days—and then——"

But what was to happen then he was not permitted to say. He had reached his point just in time; for the footman just then entered the room and handed Miss Raymond another card.

"Mrs Lester?" she said. "Show her up at once. Excuse me," she said, again turning to Warden, who looked annoyed. "It is only Angélique, who wishes to see me at once."

"Shall I go? And about to-morrow?"

Angélique entered. If circumstances had altered Barton for the better, her they had proportionately altered for the worse. She was dressed carelessly, and looked anxious, and worn, and ill. So different did she look from her usual self that Miss Raymond, preoccupied as she was, observed it as soon as she entered.

"My dear Angélique," exclaimed the latter, embracing her. "Is anything the matter—has anything happened—have you heard anything about Marie?"

Angélique recognised the presence of Warden by a look only, which he acknowledged by a slight bow. He did not think it necessary to go away, as Miss Raymond had not yet answered his last question: and he thought he might perhaps learn something if he stayed. He was not in the least afraid of Mrs Lester, but still she might have come to indulge in a little more of the wild talk with which she had lately favoured him, and he preferred that she should do so while he was by.

"Happened!" she exclaimed, "Oh, Miss Raymond, everything seems to happen now that is strange. I saw Hugh yesterday—after he had been with you. He then left me—and since then I have not seen him—him, who had never left me for an hour without my knowing where he was."

"Nor heard from him?"

"Not a word till I got this note an hour ago. You know all that has happened, do you not? What does it mean?"

"Am I to read it?" asked Miss Raymond, taking an open letter which Angélique held out to her.

"If you would——"

She took the letter to the window and read, while Warden leaned against the mantelpiece, and Angélique threw herself into an easy-chair in an attitude of despair which looked to him theatrical, but was in reality genuine. For the first time she permitted herself to be natural before the eyes of a man: but, even so, the force of habit gave to her very naturalness an artificial guise.

The letter was by no means long: but it seemed to take a long time to read. When Miss Raymond had finished,—

"This reads strangely indeed!" she said, returning to Angélique, who rose from her chair. "This from Hugh? It is impossible—there must surely be some mistake—some misunderstanding——"

Angélique shook her head. "To leave me so!" was all she could say in answer.

"And there is no clue to where he is gone?"

"None. As you see, the letter is not even dated. And if you do not know——"

"I? How should any one, if not you?" She paused, and then said, hesitatingly,—

"Perhaps Mr Warden could advise us? Have you any objection——"

Angélique shot at Warden a fierce look full of

meaning, which seemed to say, "Is it possible that you can be at the bottom of this also?" But she was in a mood to catch at straws: and if he did know anything, the extent of his knowledge and of his influence in the matter could only be ascertained by her avoiding any appearance of mistrust or reserve. Of course she did not reason this out: but she was by instinct a diplomatist, and she felt that, for once, she could afford to be open, if it was only because for once she had nothing to conceal.

"If I can be of any service," he said, answering her look by one of deprecation. "May I?" and as she was still silent, he took the letter from Miss Raymond and read to himself as follows:—

"I am on the point of leaving England for ever. I will not distress you with my reasons. You will have seen as well as I that our remaining together after what has passed between us would be wrong. I have had a hard lesson: but it must be borne. I will only say that I will stand in your way no more. Perhaps you will soon be rid of me altogether: any way, I must relieve you of me so far as I can. If you only knew how I loved you—how I trusted you—from what a dream you have woke me! And even now, if any prospects were before me such as

you would care to share, you should still share them. But to condemn you to share such as I have is out of the question now: I must not give you cause to complain that you are tied for life to a stupid fellow who has shown himself unable to help himself—much less you—or that I am so selfish a cur as to force myself upon one to whom my love is only a thing to be used and despised. Even if I were willing to lose my own self-respect and to deserve to lose that of others, I must not be so base and cruel to you. For your sake I wish that our marriage could be dissolved: but as that cannot be, I must be content with now doing for you the little that is possible, and with trying to forget how I have loved you, if I can. You shall be burdened no more with one whom you do not love, and who only drags you down. Good-bye—and may you be as happy in your own way as I wished to make you in mine.

“HUGH LESTER.”

Warden read it once again: even he was surprised: and even Angélique, who watched him narrowly, could not but admit that his surprise was unaffected. She could not see the one momentary flash of triumph that came into his eyes when he found fate thus fighting for him indeed.

"The scoundrel!" he exclaimed aloud. Angélique's eyes also flashed for a moment—she had learned many things from her desolation of the morning, and the letter had wounded her soul just where it was opening—just where it was beginning to draw a new and strange life from its very desolation. "No, Mrs Lester," he went on, "I do not ask your pardon for so speaking of one who, though he is called your husband, is for that very reason all the more a scoundrel. So this is the price of Miss Clare's forgiveness! Take my advice, Mrs Lester—let him go."

Miss Raymond stared with amazement.

"You think——" she began.

"Is it not plain enough? Hugh has had to choose between his wife and Earl's Dene: and he has acted prudently."

And so indeed it seemed. But Miss Raymond was not easily satisfied when she was called upon to condemn.

"But—Angélique," she said, "surely there must be something: he seems to allude to something that you must understand——"

"But," said Warden, "she is his wife—and he deserts her in his prosperity. For my part, I find the mystery only too plain."

"But have you no idea of what he means?" asked Miss Raymond again of Angélique.

"None—none in the least. And if you cannot help me——"

"Ah, we will help you," said Warden, "never fear. Lester will not disappear, I fancy, for very long. By leaving England, I take it, he means London: and by 'for ever,' perhaps as much as a month. The heir of Earl's Dene is not likely to be an exile."

"And what do you advise?" asked Miss Raymond.

He considered for a moment, and then drew himself up.

"I said I would come to you to-morrow," he said. "But now—I will do something else first. Yes, Mrs Lester—I am selfish enough to welcome this opportunity of being able to prove to you also that I am a better friend to you and to yours than I fear you have taken me for. You shall be righted—never fear. And then?" he asked, as he turned once more to Miss Raymond.

Angélique was mystified and confused. She had had good cause to mistrust Warden: and she had no reason to place more confidence in him now. But her strength and clearness of purpose seemed to have left her: she had lost the game and her head

at the same time. Besides, she was very unlike her old mistress in the matter of unwillingness to suspect evil : according to her reading of human nature in general, Warden's opinion of Hugh's conduct was natural and probable enough, and she felt, though as yet vaguely, that her own had rendered his only too excusable. If she could only communicate once more with Hugh by any means, she made a sort of unconscious vow, that she would throw to the winds the very remnant of her old ambition, and be to him as he would have her be. It was not that she had become less ambitious : but she had begun to wake to other needs.

"And as to Lester," Warden continued, "I think his whereabouts is very discoverable. One ought not to be a lawyer for nothing. I will set about this business at once—so now, dear Miss Raymond, good-bye till right is done at last. Then we will meet again."

And so having bent over her hand, he set out like a knight-errant to deserve the lady of his love by protecting distressed damsels and doing justice upon their oppressors. He almost regretted that for once he had to thank Fortune for favours freely bestowed, and not wrested from her by his own strength and skill.

CHAPTER XX.

CERTAINLY Warden had not spoken without book when he had said that Hugh would not prove undiscoverable, at least by him.

Nature often appears in mourning robes : but perhaps her aspect is never more suggestive of sadness than when a windless winter morning rises in mist upon a long, level waste of sand, upon which the sea, looking as though it would be in a rage if it could, comes rolling in from the far distance, its miles of expanse apparently concentrated in a horizon line of white fringed with a black streak which, contrary to all ordinary rules of contrast, looks all the blacker for being set against a dark-grey sky. Such a morning is the very expression of all that is dismal and dreary. A low sandy shore has no claim to that grandeur which, upon a bolder coast, ennobles and sublimates what is drear : there is no roar of the sea, no grand steadfastness of rocks to raise the soul above the uniform level of dull, unbroken melancholy

It was to a spot like this upon that Picard coast which has seen so many meetings between hostile nations and private foes, that Hugh came to keep his appointment with his former friend.

It was his second appointment of the kind : and a man's second duel is a very different kind of thing from his first. This time he had to go out, not with the elation of boyish courage, ready to dare all things for the sake of nothing, but with the sensation of deliberately doing what he would have avoided doing if it had been possible, and with a kind of resigned patience as to what the issue might be. He had no intention either of killing or of being killed : but, at the same time, he had no intention of turning the duel into a farce by firing in the air.

His opponent, however, was not yet upon the ground. He had reached Calais only the night before, and, having lain awake all night, of course fell sound asleep towards morning, and did not wake till nearly the hour fixed for the meeting. Presently, however, Major Andrews appeared, but alone.

" Ah ? " he said : " good morning, Lester. *Bonjour, Mossiou.* What ? Is not Warden here ? I was to meet him on the ground."

Félix shrugged his shoulders. " Perhaps he has mistaken the place ? "

"Impossible. We walked down here last night. By Jove, it's cold!"

"He will doubtless be here immediately," said Hugh, who doubted no man's courage, and had no reason to doubt Warden's. "You came over last night, didn't you? Was there any news in town?"

"Oh, nothing particular. A pinch of snuff? Let me see, though—our friend is to have to fight for his seat, after all."

"Warden?"

"Yes. Of course he's full of it: or else I shouldn't know much about a place like Denethorp, of course."

"And who with?" asked Hugh, with interest. "Not Prescott again? I thought he'd retired."

"It is Prescott, though. He seems to be a deep fellow, Prescott. I know him a little, you know, in town. Between ourselves, I shouldn't wonder if he'd got an inkling of this affair, and so thought it might be as well not to be out of the field."

Hugh was silent. At last he asked,—

"Are you sure of this?"

"As one of these pistols. Warden showed me a copy of his address—Radical, by Jove, to the backbone! Those sort of fellows ought to be hung, every man of 'em. By George, Lester, you may bring in the Radical after all! And you a good Tory too!"

Hugh's face fell. Major Andrews had intended to make a joke : but many a true word is spoken in jest.

It was not for more than a minute that he spoke. "Have you the address with you?" he asked, very gravely.

"No—but Warden has."

"And does he pledge himself to go to the poll?"

"Not exactly. But he says that circumstances may very likely induce him to—and I think you and I can pretty well guess what he means. He knows you can hit pretty straight if you please."

"Félix," said Hugh, "come here. No one," he went on, "will think the worse of me, I know, if I propose that this meeting of ours should be postponed till after the contest. I know something of Denethorp politics : and if anything should happen to-day, Prescott would walk over, and would keep the seat for ever."

"Hm!" said the Major. "For my part, I should like the affair to be put off for good and all. We shall have to risk losing a seat to the Radicals."

"Couldn't we make some arrangement of the kind?"

"Or suppose you arrange to fire in the air, and have it over comfortably?"

"I fear not. It is too serious a business, and has gone too far. But Warden must go to the poll and win—that is certain."

Major Andrews looked at his watch rather uneasily.

"But what can he be doing?" he asked. "This is one of the few occasions when a man is bound to be punctual. I will walk towards the inn, if you will excuse me, and then we will continue our conversation."

But just then Warden's figure was seen in the distance, hurrying along the sands, and in a few minutes he joined them.

He bowed both to Hugh and Félix. He was very pale, and it was obvious that he was in a high state of nervousness.

"How can I apologise for having kept you waiting?" he said. "I overslept myself—and that is no excuse, I know."

The Major took him aside.

"You have walked too fast," he said: "you had better be quiet for five minutes. Lester has proposed to me—certainly in a most honourable manner—that we should put off this affair till the election is over. For my own part, at the last moment, I should suggest that it be put off altogether. But what do you think of his proposal?"

Warden considered for a moment.

"You surprise me a little," he answered. "It cannot be put off altogether, as you know, without my owning myself in the wrong, which I cannot do, of course. And as for postponing it, that is equally impossible, as it seems to me. We are all here and ready, and we may as well have it over."

"But Mr Lester has made his offer entirely on your account."

"I am much obliged to him. But I could not think of putting you, on my account, to such inconvenience."

"I think you are wrong, Warden. You are in my hands, you know, and it is for me and for Mr Créville to decide."

"Scarcely, I think. You have probably seen enough to have gathered that the real cause of our quarrel is and must remain entirely private. That being so, the mode in which this meeting is arranged must also to some extent be less a matter for friends than usual. Our quarrel must be decided in this way sooner or later : and the sooner the better."

"It seems to me that you make my position rather a nominal one."

"Not at all. Besides, Mr Créville is in precisely the same position."

"Then let us hear what Mr Créville has to say."

"You may talk to him if you please."

"And you will put yourself in our hands?"

"I shall certainly refuse to leave this place until the affair is arranged—and that, as I have told you, can only be in one way."

"You are scarcely acting according to rule."

"On the contrary, I am quite in rule."

"I think not."

"But I do. And so——"

"I cannot act for you with my hands tied."

"I do not ask you to do that. The affair is out of your hands so far as negotiation is concerned. I consider it almost an additional insult on the part of Mr Lester to ask for a postponement now. I cannot consent to have been forced to fight, to have been actually brought at the extremest personal inconvenience to the ground, and then to be sent back again with it hanging over my head still. A man who is as prompt to quarrel as Mr Lester should be equally prompt to bring his quarrel to the end. You remember the advice of Polonius, no doubt. And this proposal is not out of consideration to myself, I assure you. You know that he and Prescott are old personal enemies, as well as political oppon-

ents : and it would be gall and wormwood to him to see Prescott returned for Denethorp."

"If that is so—why, then, certainly——"

"Why, what else can it be? He has quarrelled with Prescott, he has quarrelled with his aunt, and he has quarrelled with me. His conduct during the last election makes it simply ridiculous for him to profess to act on public grounds—and of what personal interest can the Denethorp election be to him now, except so far as he can prevent the return of one enemy now and of another hereafter? He won his own election by pistols instead of votes, as you know : and I presume he does not wish to have been under fire in vain. His sparing me to-day will prevent Prescott's return now, and you may be very sure that so professed a duellist will not spare me when my seat is won : and he knows that a third contest Prescott will hardly care to stand."

"Certainly your view alters the case. Mossiou Créville, I fear the affair must go on."

"Assuredly, Monsieur le Major. We are quite ready."

"I have something to say," said Hugh. "If Warden chooses to risk losing this election, I do not. I insist upon a postponement : and I will do nothing on this occasion to let him run the risk. It

will be quite useless to go on, for I shall fire in the air."

"That is absurd," said Warden, angrily. "This must go on, and go on now. Major Andrews agrees with me: and, if I am not mistaken, Mr Créville also. You may fire into the sea, if you like, but you must do so at your own peril. I bind myself to nothing. You know that what is between us must not end in a farce."

"Exactly so," Hugh answered. "And so why go on with what must end in a farce now?"

"It seems to me," said Major Andrews, "that when friends are disregarded and kept in the dark, the best thing they can do is to retire."

"And it seems to me," said Warden, "that Mr Lester has become exceedingly anxious that the affair should end in a farce not only now but altogether."

It was nothing less than an accusation of cowardice, which Hugh's position, as the champion of the family honour, rendered it impossible for him to pass by without putting himself in the wrong for good and all. The Major also, who began to find his own situation rather a false one, felt angry. His definition of gentlemanly conduct was perhaps rather con-

ventional: but it distinctly excluded the passage of insults upon the ground.

"Gentlemen," he said, not displeased with an excuse for washing his hands of the business, "I will wish you good morning. I did not come to be present at a duel of words: when I want that, I can go to Billingsgate." And he turned to go.

"Stop," said Hugh. "After what Warden has just said there is nothing more to say."

"I think not either," said the Major: "and so I will say nothing more,—good morning. I think my friend has managed to put himself in the wrong—and if I am ever asked about it I shall say so."

"I am much obliged to you," said Hugh: "but I must not give you the trouble. Oblige me by remaining and acting for Mr Warden still. If anything should happen, both of us may be in need of some one to speak of it with authority."

"To oblige you then, Mr Lester. Mossiou Créville, let us proceed to business. You will stand at twenty paces: and you know the signal. I will give it, and then you will both fire."

The ground was measured, and the opponents took their places. Hugh was perfectly calm, and he quite made up his mind as to what he ought and what he therefore intended to do. Warden was

equally determined, in a way: but, though outwardly calm and steady, was far from being really self-possessed. For, though determined in the sense of having made up his mind not to lose his opportunity, he was anything but certain as to how his opportunity was to be used.

About one second had now to elapse before the signal was given.

Such seconds often seem an eternity: but to Hugh it did not seem long. He was still, disinherited as he was, the avowed and conscious champion of the right and of the honour of Earl's Dene: he was in the position of some exiled prince, who still regards himself, though no others so regard him, as representing the rights and the honour of the country which has deposed him. He was bound in honour to receive his opponent's fire: but he was equally bound in duty not to let his opponent receive his own. An accident to Warden would more than probably destroy for ever the political prestige of Earl's Dene that it was his duty to support as much as its honour. Because he had lost his rights he was not in revenge to throw off his duties. He would have preferred to fight under circumstances that left him free to aim as straight as he pleased: but that could not be helped now.

Warden knew what was in Hugh's mind as plainly as if he read it in an open book. But the second seemed to him immeasurably long. He scarcely knew what to do. The temptation to take advantage of so marvellous an opportunity was almost too great to resist, for his opponent was practically standing unarmed before him : and yet, for once, he would not unwillingly have owed a little to fortune. At last his familiar devil, his one idea for which he had so long plotted and ventured, throw itself into the scale. He fixed his eyes upon those of Hugh, and felt a sort of fascination that was almost a presentiment of what was to come. Indeed he was scarcely his own master, even as it was less Faust who held the sword than Mephistopheles who guided it that slew Valentine. It is not during such instants that impulse has time to become self-conscious : and who shall say that under such circumstances any man is quite responsible for what he may or may not do ?

"One—two—three !" counted the major deliberately : and the white handkerchief fell upon the sand. Hugh threw up his hand above his head : and two shots, with scarcely the smallest interval between them, rang with a muffled sound through the mist.

**BOOK IV.—THE RETURN OF
THE WIND**

CHAPTER I.

IN one respect it is impossible for youth, even by means of the most sympathetic imagination, to be in complete sympathy, or rather in complete harmony, with nature. To know nature fully, as a wife and not as a mistress, it is necessary to have lived long enough to become a little callous about time: to have come to feel the recurrence of the seasons only as a different form of the sequence of the hours, and years to be nothing more than days. To the young, and to those who live among men, a quarter of a century is not only metaphorically speaking a lifetime: but to the old, as to all the sanctuaries of nature in which her spirit takes refuge from the insatiable attempts of mankind to drive her from the world, it seems, and really is, but an hour.

And a nation, which, after all, is not an abstraction, is in this respect, as in all others, subject to the same law as the men and women of whom it is

composed. In the first quarter of the present month—or, to speak after the manner of men, of the present century—the nation called France had lived through what seemed ages of youth: men had come and gone, in a ceaseless whirl that prolonged a condition of things in which every day had destroyed something old and brought about something new, so far as there may be any new thing under the sun. He who had lived through this period beyond the sea would on his return have found all things changed. But there were some things that were not changed, simply because they were unchangeable. To the hills, to whom a thousand years is but a day, twenty-five years had not been an hour—not a minute. Summers and winters, storms and sunshine, are not revolutions: they are nothing more to these than are its waves to the sea: the varying conditions of what in itself knows no change.

So might have thought a traveller in the recesses of the Jura who had not revisited them till the year 182—after an absence of five-and-twenty or thirty years. But so did not think the postilion of a carriage drawn by two horses that was passing along the highroad from Besançon to Lons-le-Saulnier in the month of January in that year—yes, in the month of January, for the gods of nature, like nature her-

self, live for ever, and the barbarous name of Nivose was known no more. He did not think so, simply because he was beginning to grow old, and to sympathise with the hills in sight of which he had lived all his days.

The carriage in question was a great post-chaise that had been taken at the Hotel de la Sirène at Besançon. It was sound, if not easy, upon its springs, and thoroughly safe, if proportionally heavy. The meagre horses were well up to their work—that is to say, they galloped through villages at full speed, went at a foot-pace along the level roads, and crept at that of a funeral up the hills: and the no less meagre position was well up to his—that is to say, he cracked his whip bravely when there was any one to admire his performance, and paid more attention to the safety of his equipage than to the speed of his employer, when, as was most often the case, there was no one to admire him but the crows. For the rest, the day was cold enough, but, as there was no wind, not unbearably so, and the ground was covered with untrodden snow, though none was falling, and though that which had already fallen was not sufficient to block the road. On the contrary, the sun was shining full upon the dazzling white domes that lay to the left, and more especially upon one that

rose in the distance like that of a cathedral among those of lesser shrines. It was altogether, for winter time, a rather exhilarating day for a traveller who was well provided with furs.

Such was the case with him or her—for the provision was so complete as to conceal both sex and age—who sat alone in the closed and heavily-piled carriage. The equipage proceeded quietly and slowly until it arrived at a place where a narrower road turned up-hill to the left between two lines of closely-cut trees, and where the main avenue crossed a narrow river that just here issued from a valley on its way to join the Doubs, the Saone, or the Ain. It was along the slope of the hills that formed one side of this valley or mountain-pass that the branch-road lay, so that it followed the upward course of the stream, over which it hung, higher and higher in proportion as it led farther and farther among the hills. At the fork of the two roads stood a direction-post with three arms, on one of which, among other information as to distances, and as to its standing in the department of Doubs, was written "To Besançon," on another "To Lons," and on the third, which pointed along the branch-road, "To St-Félix-des-Rochers."

It was along the latter that the two horses turned, or rather were turned, for it was not by any means of their own accord. Whether they had any special objection to St-Félix-des-Rochers or no, they were certainly not unjustified in objecting to the road that led thither. The leafless trees were not planted along it for any great distance, which was so far of consequence that, where their lines ended in a few straggling sentinels, the up-hill work fairly began, while the road itself was by no means in so perfect a state of repair as that which they left behind. On the contrary, it would not be going too far to say that it was a very bad road indeed, by no means rendered more easy to travel by the snow that hid its defects, and by a sensation of risk caused by the height to which it gradually rose above the bed of the stream. The prospect became confusing also, with its monotony of glittering white, while the high dome that had formed a sort of landmark fell gradually to the rear.

An unbroken waste of trackless snow doubtless has a grandeur of its own, but it is of a wearisome kind. It is no wonder that the figure within the coach only wrapped itself up more closely in its sables: perhaps in its own thoughts also, from which it was not likely to be distracted by any passer-by.

But unlikely things happen sometimes. A V-shaped, springless cart of the country, drawn by two mules, was, after a mile or two had been passed, seen descending the road: and when the two vehicles had met, they stopped with one accord.

The bloused driver of the cart stared hard at the postilion. The latter answered with an expressive shrug, that seemed to say, "It is not I that am gone mad," and with the words,—

"To St Félix."

"*Sacré!* I thought you had mistaken your road," said the latter, resting his elbows on his knees, and staring this time at the carriage.

"As if I didn't know this thing from a high-road!" said the postilion.

"And what have you got there?"

"A lady," answered the postilion, with a backward jerk of his elbow.

"*Sacré!* But that is an affair!"

"Without doubt. Madame is English."

"And what will she do at St Félix?"

The postilion gave another shrug. But just then the window was let down, and a woman's voice said with a pure French accent, in spite of her imputed nationality,—

"Are we not on the right road?"

"Madame is for St Félix?" asked the blouse.

"For St-Félix-des-Rochers."

"Quite straight on, Madame. You cannot miss the way."

"Then what are you stopping for? Drive on at once," she said sharply to the postilion, and let down the window again.

Each of the talkers gave one final shrug, and the horses moved on once more.

But it was now no longer, in spite of the fineness of the weather, over-pleasant travelling for any one without a definite object. But, with this particular traveller, this was probably not the case. Those very few people who, like the reader, are acquainted with St Félix, know also that to visit it without an object, at all events in winter time, is a thing unknown. At present there was nothing to be seen but snow, and that can be seen without stirring from Paris: while to see the real splendour of winter one must go where lofty and well-marked mountain ranges add splendour to its desolation. At last, just before sunset—for the carriage had set out before sunrise—a louder noise of water was heard at no great distance, and the window was again let down.

"Postilion! is not that the torrent of La Rochette?"

The postilion, who was falling into a doze, with which his style of driving by no means interfered, started, and turned round.

"*Plait-il, Madame?*"

"I asked, Is not that the torrent of La Rochette?"

He stared in his turn. "Madame is not a stranger? She knows the torrent of La Rochette?"

"Can you not answer me?"

"That is the torrent, Madame."

The furs were partially thrown back. "Stop here," she said, while she leaned forwards from the window in front, and looked round. She did not seem to feel the cold, though it was now increasing.

She seemed to be remembering, or to be making an effort to remember.

"And what lights are those up yonder?"

"It is a *châlet*, Madame. They call it Pré-aux-Fleurs."

"Pré-aux-Fleurs! Is that close to St Félix?"

"Less than a league, Madame."

"And how do we reach the town—the village?"

"Straight along the road, Madame."

"But across the torrent?"

"The road crosses the torrent, Madame."

"But is not the road sometimes carried away?"

"Ah, Madame, that used to be in old times. We have made all that right now. The last time was when I was almost a boy."

"And when was that?"

"When the Marquis was killed."

"The Marquis de Croisville?"

"Madame has heard of it, then? Yes—I saw the spot the next day. I come from St Félix, Madame must know, and I went with Jean-Baptiste. Perhaps Madame has heard of Jean-Baptiste also?"

The lady looked still more interested. "I did not know you were from St Félix," she said, in a gentler tone. "Well?"

"The road was carried clean away—it was fearful. Poor Pierre—he that was betrothed to Suzanne—had been with the Marquis. They knew all about it up there, at Pré-aux-Fleurs. He had been there just before, and had gone back to the Marquis: and in trying to get to the *châlet* they both fell into the river. It was a frightful fall."

"And how was that known?" she asked, after a pause.

"His dog, Madame. It ran down and brought up a handkerchief belonging to the Marquis, which was shown when Madame la Marquise was examined at Besançon, before they sent her to be guillotined."

"And the child?"

"Ah—Madame knows of the child?" he asked, opening his eyes in complete amazement. "That was safe—Pierre had carried it to Pré-aux-Fleurs, before he went back to the Marquis. Ah, he was a brave boy, was the little Félix! How Jean-Baptiste and he used to keep us all alive! Many a time have I danced to his violin. They were fine days—St Félix isn't what it used to be now. I went away when I married a young girl *là bas*, and then the boy, I hear, went away too."

"And this Jean-Baptiste—who was he? Was it he who brought up the child?"

"No, Madame—he was brought up at Pré-aux-Fleurs, by Father Laurent, and Aunt Cathon, and poor Suzanne. It was Jean-Baptiste taught him to play the fiddle."

"And these people—you are from St Félix—do you know them still?"

"Ah, Madame, that was when I was young. But they all live still, except Aunt Cathon, who died three years next June: and Suzanne is still at Pré-aux-Fleurs."

"And he was called Félix?"

"Félix, Madame. Father Laurent baptised him. Will not Madame proceed?"

"Wait a moment. So it is here that—that the Marquis——"

"If Madame pleases, I will show her the very spot where the road was carried away."

A few yards brought them to where the torrent, which in summer was dry, but in winter was swollen by rain and melted snow, thundered under the road.

"There, Madame," he said, pointing to a rude wooden cross such as the traveller so often sees by foreign roadsides to mark the spot of some violent death,—“we put up that when the spring came.”

The darkness was coming on, so that nothing could be seen clearly. “You say we are within a league of St Félix,” said the lady. “Take the carriage, then, across the bridge. I will descend for an instant.”

“Platt-il, Madame ?”

“Do you not hear me ?”

She spoke always as one who was used to obedience, and the man obeyed. She threw off some of her wrappings, and then stepped out into the snow, while the horses moved slowly on. There was no danger in approaching the cross, for a railing guarded the edge of the steep incline.

After more than five-and-twenty-years—that is to

say, after more than a lifetime—the Marquise de Croisville, for such she was, had found her way back to the spot where her punishment, as she believed, had begun, and where she now, tracing back the life of her child, felt already like a pilgrim who has reached the shrine. What a torrent of recollections, more blinding, more powerful than that of La Rochette, whose well-remembered thunder once more filled her ears, and unchained by any bridge, rushed through her then! She stooped down before the cross—she even knelt before it in the snow as she read with difficulty an inscription of which were only decipherable the words,—

*"Priez pour les âmes du Marquis . . . et du
Pierre Vouzy . . . 179 . . ."*

An old impulse may be strong enough to have the same effect as habit upon a naturally impulsive nature that has been long unnaturally restrained. She had clasped the cross with both her arms: and now she stretched them out as she had done when she had, in that self-same spot, first found herself alone. It was as though once more the maternal instinct that had never been dead within her led her to seek her child even as she had sought for him in vain before.

"O God!" she exclaimed in English, and half

aloud, "let my search end here—if I have sinned I have suffered! Let the end come now, as it may seem best in Thy sight."

How long she remained thus, buried in herself, cannot be known. Her youth had returned: her self-restraint was gone, and she was wrapt as it were in that ecstasy that precedes miracles. The sun had set, but the moon had risen: and the reflection of the snow made a wild and magic light that was even clearer than that of day. But as yet she was unconscious of the change. Men have remained for hours without moving, without being conscious of any outer world, when in this state of spiritual trance. But she was roused at last. Once again she mechanically stretched out her arm; and then she found that she had been recalled to herself by a light touch on the shoulder.

"Pardon, Madame," said a man's voice in French: "I feared——"

She turned round in the white moonlight. The son in one instant beheld his mother—the mother beheld her son.

This story has rambled along through many paths: it has dealt in what must often have seemed very random fashion with many people owing their connection one with another to the very extreme of

accident. Without any hero or heroine for a centre, the reader must have been possessed of capacities for sympathy quite abnormal, if he or she has been able to bestow it in any large measure upon any of these puppets in the hands of what must have looked like the blindest chance. But that which we have chosen to call Circumstance, but which he, if he pleases, may now call by a higher name, is surely vast enough in its scope, and lofty enough in its interest, to render it impossible for any one who is able in the least degree to look down for a while upon the labyrinth of life in which he, like these, has to move, to sympathise for the time with one man or woman more than with another when all are equally as much puppets as these. For such,

“ Best and worst,
Are we : there is no last or first : ”

and while a spectator who should specially interest himself in some particular knight or pawn would gain, doubtless, some living personal interest—and that is worth having—he would neither take the proper interest in, nor would he understand, the game, which is, after all, the highest matter. And so, if the spectator of the game that we have called ‘Earl’s Dene’ will take the trouble to con-

sider, he will find that even the most apparently random move of the most obscure piece on the board was absolutely necessary to bring about this strange meeting then and there. If in the course of it he has seemed to pass through much barren country—if he has often lost the clue, or found its threads perplexed and knotted—if, seeking with whom to sympathise, he has found the evil strong and the good weak—it is of the nature of the game called human life, and not of this small fragment of it, that he must complain.

The wind—which seems, at least, to blow as it listeth—which had blown about, in one direction or another, according to the nature with which they had been created or which they had acquired, all these living people who have crowded, perhaps it may be thought overcrowded, the air, like a flock of birds who have no conscious object save to devour the carrion or to escape the fowler, had at length sunk down where it had arisen. It “had gone toward the south and turned about unto the north: it had whirled about continually, and had returned again according to its circuits.” All those years had been to the Marquise de Croisville but as one instant: it was as though that vain stretching out of the arms that she had made a lifetime ago had

not proved barren: as though she had stretched them out not to lose, but to find.

How could she, of all people, not believe that it was so her prayer had been answered? She was scarcely even surprised: her soul was wrought to its highest pitch, and, had she experienced a real miracle, it would not have seemed a miracle to her: had the dead Marquis risen from the dead, and stood in the white moonlight as phantom-like in reality as all else around her appeared, she would not have wondered. Once more, one feels no surprise, they say, in dreams.

And yet this was no dream, though Félix, to whom the nature of the emotions that filled her were unknown, almost thought so. It was more likely, or seemed more likely to one who had seen but his own dimly-lighted path through the maze of circumstances that had led him here, that a phantom mother should stand before him, than that she should stand before him in the flesh.

She had slowly risen, and now they stood face to face. Alone, in the moonlight, and upon the snow, both looked phantom-like indeed.

But they stood not thus for long. If she stood before him as the incarnation of dreams in which even Marie had no share, he stood before her as

that of her memories in which no living mortal shared, but in which she herself recognised the hand of a destiny that was no less powerful than it was awful with mystery. Without another thought, without a question as to what had been or what might be, she, with a sob of "Victor!" threw herself, not upon his breast, but at his feet.

It was his father's name that she uttered: his own, while he had yet been her son: it was his name to her. He raised her, and supported her with his arm.

He, too, was less filled with emotion than with awe. "I meet, then, my mother at my father's grave," he said, scarcely knowing what he said, but speaking as men seem to speak in dreams.

There was no need for either to ask how the other had been brought there. One does not question when an event is its own sufficient answer.

Thus they remained for some instants without a word. At last the Marquise said,—

"Speak to me, Victor! Have I indeed been dreaming all these years, or is it now that I dream?"

The words recalled Félix to himself. Would it had been a dream, like all the rest of his days! For he had that to tell which he would give all

things to be able to leave untold. Still it must be told, and that now.

"It is no dream, my mother," he said at last. "I am indeed your son—and—may I be that to you and more also!—for you have no longer any son but me."

He spoke the last words so gravely, so sadly, that the Marquise started as if she had heard the first stroke of a funeral bell. In the exaltation of the moment she had forgotten all that had lain between it and that which had immediately preceded it a lifetime ago. But now she remembered many things, while Félix bowed his head with a kind of shame.

"I come from one grave to another," he said only.

This was all that he said, while he raised his face and looked at that of his mother to see how he should proceed. But he learned nothing there: though as yet she could not guess what was in his mind and on his tongue, the look of stone that her face had so often worn of late, and which had for a while been thawed, was returning to it once more, and once more hardening it into age. Could nothing happen to her, not even this meeting, which seemed given by heaven as a pledge of pardon, that was not fated to be bound up with despair?

But he had passed the barrier, and went on.

"Yes—he died, my brother, for you and for me. It was I who ought to have died! I was with him when he fell—and he shall be avenged. I have sought for you to tell you: for I knew what he had been to you, and what he had become to me. But you had left your home, none knew whither: and I—what was left for me but to return to my own? Would I had never left it!—I, who have brought nothing but harm to all I have ever known—even to him, even to you, our mother, whom I would have given my life to save from harm. Yes, he is dead for me—and I live to tell you this and to tell you here!"

She was still silent. She was no longer among phantoms now, but among terrible realities even though the exaltation of soul through which she had passed had not yet died away. He went on, in a kind of apathetic desperation, feeling instinctively that it was best here and thus that all should be told.

He told her all he knew, all that he had heard, all that he had guessed since all was over. He told her, as rapidly as he might, and as tenderly, of his quarrel with Warden, of the solicitude of Hugh for her honour and for his above his own life, even above his

own honour : of how Hugh, for his sake and for hers, had managed to take the place that should have been his, and of how he had fallen, nothing less than a martyr to the great cause of simple duty, whose true martyrs have been so few. As he spoke, his sight grew clear : and his clearness of vision gave clearness to his words. She understood also : and both, as he spoke, felt themselves to be standing together in the presence of a life and death which, in their blending together at last into one consistent whole, had, though fulfilled by one of the least among men, become heroic, nay, even sublime, and, in its mere simplicity, pathetic beyond the reach of words.

And yet Hugh himself would not have understood a word of all this : and in that lay the very deepest pathos of it all. In the presence of such a death was no place for ordinary sorrow, for common tears. In such an end there was something to have lived for, something that carried the man who had lived for it, in spite of all things, far above the world, and which made grief almost an insult, when even to wish to call him back to life would be to wish him ill.

With all the affection for him that lay at the very depth of her heart, his mother would have felt more pride than grief had he died in battle in front

of the charge. Could she feel, then, nothing more than grief now that he had died in defence of all for which she herself would have been proud to die, had she been he? She dared not, in that spot, before that cross, so wreathed with older memories for *immortelles*, and in the presence of her living child, admit any selfish feeling of despair—the time for that had gone by. She only bowed her heart before what she, according to her creed, could not but feel to be the hand of God Himself, and, less consciously, before that simple strength of human will which, when it consummates itself in death, renders even weakness strong, unravels the clue of the maze, throws a mist of poetry over the sorriest details of life, and makes mere common human nature sympathetic in spite of all things. Yes, circumstance may be conquered after all: but it is only by those who are content and strong enough to die. The very mortal and very human nature of poor Hugh was superior to all things now, even to her affection: and she felt, though unconsciously, that it was not for her, dwarfed in the shadow of the spirit of death that ennobles all things, even to wish to render death less noble by rendering it less complete.

“His will be done,” she said at last. “Even as I

prayed so it has come to me. And take no vengeance," she said, with a stronger voice. "He who has begun will know how to finish also: it is not for us to repay. And so—oh, Hugh, my son!" she exclaimed; and then, at last, she threw herself upon the breast of another, and wept bitterly.

Terrible are the winter tears of one who has never learned to weep. Félix was unable to utter a word. He stood there and supported her as she wept, not so much sharing in her grief as in the awe with which the still silence of the night was filled.

But her tears, once set free, flowed on. It was as though the tempests of years had been gathered up to burst forth at once. Still she could not pass the night in the snow: she must have immediate rest. And yet he could not leave her so, even for a moment, and they were still at some distance even from Pré-aux-Fleurs—still farther from St Félix, whence he supposed she had come on foot to the spot where he had found her.

His own mingled feelings were giving way to fearful anxiety. If he could not calm her—if she were to sink down where she was—if the reaction were to come?—But suddenly he heard the neigh of a horse beyond the bridge. He called out, but received no answer.

But still the sound reassured him. So he made her sit down gently by the cross, in the very spot in which the Marquis had waited for the return of Pierre, and hurried over the bridge. A few yards farther on he saw the carriage and the two horses, which had waited there patiently for the best part of an hour. Indeed they would not improbably have waited there all night, for the postilion had fallen asleep. He was not disturbed by thoughts, and the night was cold.

Indeed, so soundly was he asleep that Félix had to shake him before he could be roused.

"All right, Madame," he said, rubbing his eyes. "*Diable !*" and he started on seeing Félix by his side, and on becoming confusedly conscious that he had been dreaming. "What is it? Is Madame in the carriage?"

"Turn the horses. Madame is waiting—and be quick."

They turned, and recrossed the bridge. Madam Clare—the Marquise de Croisville—what matters it how she is called now?—was kneeling by the wooden cross, which was embraced by her arms; and with her also all things were at an end, so far as the end of life may be the end of all.

CHAPTER II.

AND so Warden had triumphed. He had proved that man can triumph over circumstance after all, and that he himself, at least, was capable of forming a plan, and of carrying it through fairly to the end.

When he saw what his own hand had done, it must not be supposed that, though the sight was not one that he could look on unmoved, he felt any useless scruples or unpractical regrets. He was practical not by habit but by nature: and he was therefore incapable of entertaining any feeling that was out of place and that could lead to nothing. He had made up his mind that this duel must end fatally to one of the two, and he felt that he had no more real cause for self-accusation than the drowning man who has been compelled by the instinct of self-preservation to thrust a comrade in danger from a plank that is only large enough to support one. Of course to have actually slain a man with one's own

hand is very different from slaying him in thought only: but still facts are facts, and it is for weaker men than Warden to regret the inevitable. Wise men never indulge in regrets and retrospects save in order to gather experience from them for the time to come.

Besides, if unpleasant thoughts did come—for, after all, he had raised a ghost that it was much more easy to raise than to lay—he had the art, far more common than people like to allow, of turning conscience into a useful advocate. Indeed that same conscience is often more than a useful advocate: it is a very corrupt judge, and sells itself readily for the most trivial price to the requirements of self-love. The complex character of human nature is certainly a terrible *crux*. Even Warden, clear-sighted as he was, was able to deceive himself as he was able to deceive others: and he had considered his own conduct so long from his own point of view that, now that he needed excuse for it even in his own eyes, he was able to persuade himself that he deserved the credit that he was about to claim.

So at last, after a short period of exile, he returned to England in the character of a well-intentioned and unfortunate man, to obtain the reward that was due to his good intentions, and the consolation that was

due to his misfortune. Immediately after the duel he had written two long letters of explanation—one to Miss Clare, the other to Miss Raymond. To the former he received no answer: but to the latter he received one that was almost such as he would himself have dictated. Whatever Miss Raymond's secret instincts might be, she could not but feel both pity and admiration for the man who in the cause of justice had been obliged to kill one who had been his friend. It must be remembered that to have shed blood was not in those days a disgrace in itself, so long as the blood had been shed in honour: and a duellist, so far from being regarded as an assassin, might very easily come to find himself regarded as a hero. Besides, she, as a woman, was naturally ready enough to admire the doing of such deeds as, so it must seem to them, though falsely enough, only a very brave man can do: and not only so, but she felt bound, in her feminine idea of honour, to do all that she could for him who had risked his life in what she had made her own cause. He had gone out from her as a knight-errant: and he had obtained that claim upon her which the knight of old had upon his lady when for her sake he had slain a giant or a dragon—that claim which, when she denied it, rendered her a by-word in the songs of

the minstrels who sang of her lover's deeds. He had, as it were, won her with the strong hand—a way of wooing that is the only way to prevail with ladies who will say neither yes nor no. That feeling of distrust that had made itself felt, upon her first introduction to him in Market Street, and which still, in spite of her reason, had never quite died away, had now to yield to the feeling that it was no use for her to hesitate or to strive any longer: that matters were in fact settled for her, and that she had nothing to do but to submit to the logic of facts and yield. She deplored the course of events with all her soul: but it was with all that soul that lies beyond the reach of reason. Her reason could not but admit that that which she deplored was a great misfortune indeed, but one for which, at most, Warden was to be pitied and sympathised with, not blamed. Was it even altogether so much as a great misfortune? Was not Angélique freed from a husband who had sold her for the good things of the world, and was not Warden an instrument in the hands of Providence for bringing about the triumph of justice? She felt that to blame him would be almost a sin.

It will hence be gathered what had been the tone of the letter addressed to her by Warden, and of the answer which she had not delayed to send. It was

after all, unnecessary for Warden's success that he should gain her whole heart to its very depths, in the same way, for instance, as Félix had gained that of Marie, not by virtue of anything that he had done, but by the right of one sympathetic nature over another: it was enough for him that she should regard herself as fairly won.

But of course, even so, things must not be hurried to their climax. The course was, however, sufficiently clear. Hugh and Angélique were certainly out of the running, and it would be easy enough for a man of resource to throw Félix out of it also. He had satisfied himself that to prove Félix an impostor would be the easiest thing in the world, even to the satisfaction of Miss Clare, and, as a necessary consequence, to get the will in Miss Raymond's favour revived. Meanwhile his receiving no reply from his patroness was not in itself an ill sign, more especially as she did not revoke her support of his candidature. It was not to be expected that, under the circumstances, she should be capable even of the physical labour of writing: and some shock to her body or to her mind would only render his future proceedings the easier, by rendering her more likely to be subject to the influence over her which he knew so well how to use. She might even hate him as the means

of the death of Hugh: but he knew that he could reckon upon her sense of justice not to condemn him practically for an accident that he had been unable to avoid.

But to turn for a moment from personal to political matters. The glories of Denethorp election-time seemed to have departed with the riotous proceedings that had marked the last. The close of the present contest was utterly tame: Madam Clare was absent from home, no one knew where, and the successful candidate was again absent from the hustings. It was Mr White who thanked the electors in the name of Warden for choosing the latter to represent his native town. Prescott did not even go to the poll.

The new member for Denethorp waited patiently abroad until he heard that all gossip had ceased and the result of the election was known. Then he took the opportunity of writing again to Miss Clare, and of returning to England to lay his laurels at the feet of her who was to add to them the best of them all, and, what was more to the purpose, the richest also.

It was a cold winter's morning when he crossed from Boulogne to Dover—even he had sufficient sentiment to choose to pass through that town in preference to Calais. From Dover he wrote to Miss

Raymond to announce his return, and to ask her when he might call upon her in London; and, after a day or two, he received the following reply:—

“DEAR SIR,—I shall be prepared to see you on Wednesday next at any time in the afternoon.—
Yours truly, ALICE RAYMOND.”

So curt and cold a note rather surprised him: but he naturally set it down as to be accounted for by some turn of girlish caprice which is always most active as the time approaches when it must for ever be laid aside. And so the conqueror of circumstance spent the intervening time in going quietly about his ordinary affairs, which had got a little into arrear, and on the afternoon of the day named went to ——— Street to claim his reward.

Of course in the route to final triumph there were still risks and chances to encounter: but the great stages were past, and those that remained were difficult—so far as they were difficult at all—only as matters of detail. He would be no longer Mark Warden if he failed, now that he had nothing to do but to hold out his hand to gather the grapes, no longer sour, but as ripe and as sweet in imagination as in reality, that were training down in clusters as if asking him to pluck them and turn them into

wine. He took prophetic stock of his future life as he walked along. Hugh's conduct and character would show in the blackest colours, more black even than that of the adventurer whom he had made his tool: he himself would appear the honest friend of all and the champion of the right: Miss Raymond would be once more the heiress of Earl's Dene, and he, in due time, would become the husband of Miss Raymond. At last Miss Clare would in the course of nature die: and the grandson of the Redchester druggist would be master of New Court and of Earl's Dene together. If he could only quite rid himself of the ghost of Hugh! But that also would fade away in time.

Once more he knocked at the door, all the more boldly because a little nervously—for he too had begun to learn what is meant by nerves—and was once more shown into the drawing-room. Miss Raymond would be with him in a few minutes.

But the minutes were more than a few: and, being nervous, he began to grow impatient. He was not fond of girlish caprices that meant nothing, and which wasted time. At last, after he had looked at all the pictures on the wall, turned over all the books on the table, looked out of both the windows, and pulled to pieces a crocus, the door opened. He

turned round suddenly to meet his future wife, and found himself face to face with Marie.

The heart of the conqueror of fate and circumstance sank within him. He turned pale, and reeled for an instant as if he had received a blow. Was Nemesis so strong then, after all, that it could call people from the very grave sooner than let itself be subdued by man?

Nor did he see Marie alone. A little behind her stood his Frankenstein-demon Dick Barton, who had, followed her into the room, and now stood just within the door with a grim smile of triumph in his eyes when he saw the effect of the vision upon his foe.

Marie's, however, were fixed on the ground as she entered slowly. When she raised them and fixed them upon his, it was as though she were indeed regarding him whom she had once thought she loved from beyond the unpassable gulf of a grave that had separated them for ever.

"It is not I who have broken my promise," she said, in a low voice, but not timid like that of the Marie of old when she addressed those whom she loved or feared. "I have returned to life for a moment that my promise may not bring ruin to others. If I could, I would be dead indeed! But, until that time comes, I must not by my silence be

the cause of leading you and others into sin and misery. I could not but let Miss Raymond know that your wife she cannot be. And now——”

Even Warden's readiness failed him. The city of B—— had not as yet been swallowed by an earthquake : and until that or some equal mischance should happen to it, his marriage could be proved. His conduct might appear to be as white as snow, that of Hugh as black as ink—Félix might be proved a very Mahomet of imposture—Miss Clare might make any number of new wills—Miss Raymond might have given him every scruple of her heart,—but he was married to Marie : his lies, when he had denied it, stared him full in the face, and not only so, but in the faces of all the world. “If it were not for Marie,” indeed ! For Marie ? She had been a curse to him from the beginning. If it were not for this girl he would have gained all that his soul desired : through her, all that he had done, all that he had gained, was changed into waste and loss. Through her, he, the practical man, had been led into chasing an impracticable dream—into wasting himself to gain nothing, and far less than nothing. To his self-reliant nature this was the hardest thing to bear of all : it was harder even than failure to feel that the failure was of his own contriving.

He could, in his first desperate moment of mortification, have struck her down on the spot. But habit, perhaps also a new-born sense of fear, resumed its influence, and he found his tongue.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he asked. "I know too well that I have enemies," he added, with a fierce look at Barton, "but that you——"

Even now he felt that had he met Marie alone he might have prevented the betrayal of his secret, by regaining his old influence over her whom he had held subject to it for so long. But, while even an animal like Barton stood there to be a witness of what he might say, it was impossible. In one moment all that he had striven so hard to win, the grapes that were actually hanging within his hand, the cup that was fairly at his lips, became an incarnation of his evil genius in the person of a drunken ruffian and a girl. "If it were not for Marie?" No,—if he had only not stayed his hand—if, instead of practising all this barren diplomacy, he had only actually done what it had once occurred to him to do—if he had only at one final irrevocable blow rid himself utterly and for ever of her whose mere existence meant the death of all the hopes which he had lived to realise.

"It is best to say nothing," she said, with a ring

in her voice that silenced him, and a steady look that made his own, for the first time in his life, seek the ground. "God knows I feel for you—that you cannot wish we had never met more than I! You thought me dead, and I wished you to think so. I have come to life for a moment, not to return to you—not to be a burden upon you any more—but to save you from an error into which I myself led you when that error would have proved fatal to you and to her whom you love. Even that I was unwilling enough to do for my own sake, God knows! If you could have been free to seek happiness with her, I too should have been happy in your happiness. You must not think me cruel—I also have my own load to bear. Indeed I could not have kept our secret, even if I had been justified in doing so. There were others——"

"Others?"

"Yes—I tried to keep my existence secret—but it became known, and then—ah, you do not know how near I was to death itself in order that our secret might be kept for ever—that you might be free! But—well, it was not to be."

Could this be the meek-spirited child whose love he had carelessly thrown away? He began now to suspect that even had Barton not been there he

would have found his old influence at an end with her who was beginning to make him feel hers. He was not one to appreciate that deepest kind of emotion of all, that, being beyond all words, can only express itself coldly and with restraint, any more than he was one to sympathise with the instinct that leads some few people in the world to do that which is right, come what may. He was even tempted to believe that her coldness of manner came from anger, and her conduct from jealousy and revenge.

"And now," she said at last, with a strange change of manner—in a tone of voice so devoid of life that he seemed to detect in it a shadow of contempt, of which in truth her voice was as incapable as her heart of containing towards any one, even towards him—"and now I shall return to my hidden life once more. I have saved you, and if I ever show myself to you again, it shall never be to your harm." She held out her hand, with something like the old tenderness. "Say that you forgive me," she said. "What else could I have done?" Her eyes were glistening, though her voice did not tremble even now.

But he held back his hand.

"No," he said, with a sudden burst that he could

not control, "I do not forgive you. You have been my curse ever since I knew you. But do not think things will end here. I do not know what you may have said to Miss Raymond: but, judging from your companion, I do not fear but that I shall be able to deny it all. I will see Miss Raymond—there are two stories to tell, as you know. I suppose you have told her you are my wife. But when did you last see Félix Créville?"

The half-veiled threats were barren, and he knew it when he made them. She did not answer: but, with a look of infinite pity, seemed to his eyes to vanish like an apparition from the room.

Barton held the door open for her as if she had been a queen, closed it again, and then returned. The smile of triumph had gone.

"There," he said, without a tinge of mockery in his tone—"here is a note for you from Miss Raymond." Then, in his natural manner, he went on, "I suppose you set all this day's work down to me? If you do, I am proud to say you are right in your reckoning. Should you like to know how? It is always as well for a man to understand his position. You see——"

Warden took the note and turned his back contemptuously. He read as follows:—

"You will understand why I have not seen you after seeing poor Marie, of whom I heard just before I last heard from you. I need not say that you must never think of our meeting again."

And that was all. Miss Raymond, with all her tendency to sentiment, was far too well regulated a young lady even to feel sentiment when it clashed with the code of propriety, far less to express it. But, though this was all, it was more than enough. Had he been alone, he would have vented some of his rage by tearing the paper into shreds: but, as it was, he deliberately folded it up as if it had been of no consequence, and placed it in his pocket. Then he rang the bell, and, having obtained pen, ink, and paper, wrote as follows:—

"DEAR MISS RAYMOND,—I am far too overwhelmed by the blow that has fallen upon me—by my unexpected discovery that I am not free to address you—to seek an interview with you now. I am the most unfortunate man in the world. A faithless woman, whom I believed dead, stands between me and all my hopes of happiness. But, in spite of all things, always think of me as being still yours while I live—no less now than when I believed myself free. It is too late to conceal that I love you with all my

soul. I cannot ask for your love—but I claim your pity for the most unhappy man on earth.

“With or without hope I shall live for you still.
Yours, dear Miss Raymond, for ever.

“M. WARDEN.

Having given orders that this should be delivered to Miss Raymond at once, he left the house. Many another man would, in his position, have gone straight to his chambers and blown out his brains. Conscience is not quite so good an advocate, not quite so corrupt a judge, when our affairs go ill as when they go well. It requires to be feed and bribed to bestow its consolation: and is apt to go over to the enemy when we can fee and bribe it no more.

And perhaps the fact that Warden did not succumb to that remorse which is the poignant consciousness of having failed by his own one piece of folly depended on the turning of a feather. For his consciousness of his failure was as poignant as his failure itself had been complete. His note to Miss Raymond had been but a flourish: and he had scarcely meant it for anything more. But it was not fated that his name was to be written in the list of suicides. He left the house and walked eastward. It is almost, nay, it is quite impossible to describe in words the

mental and moral state of an ambitious and self-confident man who, at the very outset of his career, has to own to himself that he has already expended all his resources in destroying every prospect upon the attainment of which he had set his heart, and which he seemed already to have attained, and for the sake of which, moreover, he had committed what practically amounted to a crime. A man like him will not think evil evil if it ends in good fruit: but the doing of unsuccessful evil is simply the greatest blunder in the world, and haunts him with shame. He had deserted his wife, and slain his friend, and wasted his time and his energy, and toiled and plotted and lied, and all for nothing—so that the rest of his life, if he could find the heart to live it, must henceforth be spent in a slow and laborious attempt to rake together the merest crumbs of a feast that he had thrown away. It was as though all the blossom of the orchard, all the promise of an abundant harvest that foretold full reward for all the ceaseless care and toil of the husbandman, had been swept away by one hour of unseasonable frost in the midst of June.

Filled with an overwhelming disgust towards himself and a sort of desperate hatred for all things and all people that would for once, if he had had the chance, have induced him to forget his habitual

prudence in a desire for revenge, he did not at first hear a heavy step behind him.

"Well, Warden," said Barton, who was not long in overtaking him, "you are an unlucky dog, I must say. Fancy you, of all men, having a wife hidden away out of sight, and of your letting her turn up just at the wrong time. But that's a way women have—not that it makes you less unlucky. But—what will the Dons at St Margaret's say?"

That was another item in the stakes that he would have to pay to Fortune: and though in the greater disappointment he had forgotten it, it was, in one way, the heaviest item of all. His Fellowship was his only means of livelihood: and that gone, he would be driven to begin his whole life over again, in order to keep clear of starvation. The bar, even, must be out of the question: so even must the Church: so must the career that the University gives to wranglers and medallists within her own walls. Nothing seemed open to him but to become a lawyer's clerk or an usher in a school.

The mere sound of Barton's voice acted like a sting. But he took no notice, and turned down the next street.

But Barton turned down the next street also.

"What in the name of common-sense made you

make such an ass of yourself? But, well—young men will be young men, I suppose, even though they understand the differential calculus: and I daresay they won't think the worse of you in the House. Only to have married her! about that I am afraid you must expect to be laughed at, just a little. If you had only——”

Warden faced round.

“I beg,” he said, “that you will go your way, and let me go mine.”

“The devil you do! Well, I will.” And he kept on walking by Warden's side. “I was saying——”

At last Warden stopped again.

“Am I to understand that you want to force a quarrel upon me?”

“Not the least—that's the sort of thing I leave to you. Only my way happens to be the same as yours, that's all.”

“On the contrary. There lies your way, and there mine.”

“I beg your pardon. I feel inclined for a little talk. I always feel friendly to a man who's down. Would half-a-crown be any help to you? The ‘Trumpet’ owes me a few shillings——”

“You —— blackguard,” Warden began, regardless of consequences.

"*Arcades ambo*. That's all the more reason for our taking the same road. 'A fellow-feeling,' you know."

Warden, without condescending to reply, hailed a coach that happened to be passing, and got into it. He was driven to the Temple: but, on reaching the gate, the door of the coach was opened to him by Barton. Was he literally to be haunted for ever by this demon whom he had raised to be his ruin?"

"You might have offered me a seat," said the latter. "I daresay I shouldn't have taken it, for the coachman was a gentleman compared to us poor devils, and I always try to cultivate the society of my betters. You've paid him?" he asked, when the coach drove off and the two found themselves alone on the pavement of the court in which Warden lived. "That's right. Every one ought to pay their debts—and now I'm going to pay you mine."

"By taking yourself off, I hope."

"Presently. But first I am going to give you the biggest thrashing that I ever gave any man—and I have given a few in my time. Place and time are admirable. It is out of term, and we shan't be disturbed."

Warden turned a little paler for an instant, but looked him full in the face. "There are two words to that bargain," he said steadily, while he felt his blood begin to run faster, and his fingers closed involuntarily in his palms.

"There are no words at all—or, if there are, there is but one, and that's Dick Barton's."

"You drunken scoundrel," said Warden, "if you think you are going to bully me into fighting you, you are mistaken. It is much more likely that you will bully me into giving you into custody."

"Do so, pray—and hear what I shall say before the Bench. I won't tell you why I mean to thrash you, but I'll tell his worship with pleasure."

"You are an insufferable bully, and a boaster besides. So take care. I know how to use my fists—perhaps better than you."

"A boaster? Not at all. Do I say that I'm the best Grecian since Porson? It's because I am. That I drink the hardest heads under the table? It's because I do. And I say that I shall thrash you into rags because I shall."

"And why, pray?"

"Because I choose. And so, you murdering rascal, you lying thief, you shall have three falls—one for Félix, one for Lester, and one for Esther Barton,

if you know who that is: but first you shall have one for——”

In whose honour he struck the first blow must remain unknown, for the blow came before the word.

Warden, however, had not practised with the gloves in vain, and though he was the smaller, he had far more science—indeed Barton had no science at all—so the issue seemed doubtful. Besides, there is a sort of conventional notion abroad, utterly unfounded upon fact, that giants and boasters always get the worst of it. But Barton was not one to stand on trifles. He prided himself upon freedom from all rules, even those of the ring: and he meant winning with all his soul. In a very few seconds, by dint of sheer strength and weight, and of an utter carelessness whether he received any damage to himself or no, he, heedless of Warden's blows, simply rushed in, and by a wrestling trick, more effectual, perhaps, than fair, caught him up from the ground and threw him with all his force a good yard or two away.

The conqueror of circumstance came down with a sharp hard fall upon the flags of the empty court, so that he lay stunned. Barton's boasted strength had proved greater than even he had given himself credit

for. But, having satisfied himself that his victim was not dead,—

“No,” he said to himself, “such dogs as that have cats’ lives. I should like to have played with him a little longer, though. Well—we must hope he has broken a bone or two—that’ll be something. And if not, one can always give him the rest another time.”

And so he left the Temple, leaving word at the porter’s lodge that a gentleman was lying dead-drunk in Palm Court, and that it would be a charity to take him up to his chambers.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

Château de Croisville, March 1, 18—. —This is the anniversary of my birthday, which I have at last discovered. Not as people for the most part reckon birthdays: not the anniversary of the day on which I first saw the light, nor even, as I have until now reckoned mine, of that on which the light of the outer world first enters the soul as well as the eyes. It is the anniversary of the birthday of my true life—that is to say, of my happiness: of the day when I at last made my wife her whom I had learned to love while it seemed impossible that she could ever be mine while we lived.

And even now, the years that since then have passed by have only taught me that there is nothing so unreasonable as reckoning time by years. I mean that she is not a day older, nay, that she is younger, than when she first became my friend, and far more beautiful: and me her love has always kept young.

Thank God we have many a year yet to come before either of us feels old !

The story of my youth has therefore, in one sense, come to an end, though in another it has barely begun. When I look back upon the shadows—for they are in truth nothing more—that form the cast of the comedy, or tragedy, or tragi-comedy, of which I, from my own point of view, am the hero, I am bewildered by the minute complications of other shadowy lives that were necessary to bring about my own happiness: it seems to me that others were made to mourn in order that I might rejoice, and that others were made to fail in order that I might succeed. Why should I have been singled out for happiness any more than any of the rest? But so it is: and nothing is left for me to do but to render myself as worthy of my happiness as I can. And that, with her to help me, surely ought not to be hard. My days of weakness ought to be nearly over, seeing that I have now been for so many years the owner of a twofold soul.

It seems to me that the lives of men and women are like a system of complicated curves, the laws of whose courses are undiscoverable: that cross and blend, diverge and converge, part and run parallel, without any apparent reason why they should do

any one of these things more than any other. So it must be with every story, and not with mine alone, that professes to speak of the life-courses of men and women as they are, and not as we would have them be. Triangles, squares, and arcs of circles are much more agreeable and easy to deal with than those wild curves that form a labyrinth without order and without law. A story that is true to nature has of necessity no motive, no beginning, no middle, no end. It takes its rise in the land of shadows, it passes through mists, and to the land of shadows it returns—it is incomplete because it has no limit, not even that of death. And as for poetical justice, is it not the orthodox theory of this life that it is something which is wrong here to be set right hereafter? And, indeed, were it otherwise, what is called poetical justice would be, in truth, the greatest injustice of all, for the man never lived yet who deserved to be sentenced by man to perfect happiness or perfect misery. Life is not like those children's stories in which the good child both eats its cake and has it too : it is something far more unsatisfactory and far more noble.

So much have I come to feel this that I can look back without, I hope, too harsh a judgment even upon him who, for a time at least, seemed to hold in his hand the threads of the lives of us all, and to

knot and entangle them for his own purposes according to his will. I am glad that, rendered desperate as I was at the time, the punishment that so suddenly and so unexpectedly overtook him did not come from my hand. Indeed I should have mistrusted my own motives had I not been forestalled in my plans of vengeance: for his death meant for me not only the fulfilment of vengeance for the past, but life and happiness to come. As it was, my own ideas did not go beyond a pistol-shot, in order that I might do to him what he had done to me and mine: while in fact the punishment—for as a punishment his fate, seeing that it was the direct consequence of his own deeds, must be considered—was of a kind that seems almost too heavy to be deservedly inflicted upon any man whose life is before him still. And yet—so hard is it to arrive at any conclusion of the matter—it may be that, after all, he was dealt with more mercifully than if he had recovered from the fearful injuries that he had received on the very day on which his triumph had seemed so secure, and had he been able to recommence a prosperous and even more than successful career. Terrible must the doom have been for that energetic and ambitious man to have to linger out those two long years—how long they seemed to me also!—in

a paralysis of body and prostration of mind that was worse than death, a burden upon his father and sister, without daring even to call upon the law to avenge him upon Hugh's avenger, and to have to feel that it had been his own energy, his own ambition, that had led to it all, even to the very manner of his death: to feel that having, by his real merits, grasped an honest substance, he had not only deprived himself of it by expending all his power in clutching at a shadow, but had overreached his balance so as to sink hopelessly beneath the stream: to find that he had wasted his labour in building his house upon the sand. This must indeed have been terrible: but, supposing that he had recovered from his bodily injuries, that he had faced the world once more, that he had achieved the worldly success that must inevitably have come to such a man at last, if he only lives long enough, the wise know that to such as he success carries its own sting. An unshared triumph is no triumph at all: and the sympathy that might have been his both through good and ill, he had thrown away for the sake of the same shadow for which he had thrown away more material good. It had been the fable of the dog over again. And so, perhaps, something not unlike poetical justice in its very highest sense had been dealt after all, if it is

true that mercy is the highest mode of justice. His offence had been the heart of stone: and that needs no additional weight to render it harder to bear—it is its own punishment, in the long-run, as surely as the warm heart, however much it may suffer, is its own ample reward. Better, will the wise man hold, would be the life of even such as poor Dick Barton: and that is saying much indeed. It is true that when a devil such as his once gets hold of a man it may never be exorcised. But I, speaking for myself, and with my whole heart, can say that he had made one friend, and I have every reason to believe that, before he died, he had obtained one glimpse, none the less real because it had been short and transient, of higher things than even Greek tragedy. Even though the vision of what may be for others and what might have been for him, as it came to him angel-wise in the person of her whom he called his sister, and who, to him, was Esther Barton to the end, had crossed the desert of a life like his only for one passing moment, and only to leave the desert to all outward appearance blacker than before, still he had for that one moment actually seen the light which he who had held in his hand the key to its most secret chamber had never seen and was incapable of seeing. He

whose eyes have once been opened can never be as if he had always been blind : and though the rose may open but to leave behind it only its thorns, still they are the thorns of the rose. He, too, before his life came to an end, if he had not really enjoyed the fulfilment of what Schiller's heroine calls all earthly happiness, had at least felt, I think, if he had not understood, what life and its highest happiness may mean—and even so much as that is the lot of but a fortunate few. And so, while Warden would, unless the unchangeable may change, have passed through a successful career such as, had he survived, must have been his, without finding anything worth the finding, the unsuccessful man had found something in life—or rather something had come to him—which was worth not only the finding but the keeping also, and which, though it brought with it the fulness of an unspeakable regret, saved him from the worst sort of death that lies in despair. To the outer world, to all but to me, it need not be said, he remained the same Dick Barton, or nearly the same, and as such is he remembered : but, at the end, it was not his deepest soul that spoke, although he died with the brandy-bottle by his side, and on his lips the words,—

*“Panta gelos, cai panta conis, cai panta to meden—
Panta gar ex alogon esti ta ginomena :”*

"All is laughter, and all is dust, and all is nothing : for out of foolishness come all things that are."

Once more—if I am right—God be praised for that and for all things! From the land of dreams and shadows I have passed into that of realities : from that of passion into that of love : from that of what men call art into that of nature. It is true that not one of my ambitious aspirations has been fulfilled : they, too, belong to the land of dreams. So far, I own, my life has been a failure. I have not become a Moretti, not even a Prosper. But what then? It only proves that I once mistook talent and love of art for Genius, and that I have become wise enough to make the mistake no more. I am not so childish as to complain when my true life is still developing within me and around me day by day.

Certainly my life has been in any case an eventful one. Born a noble, in childhood a peasant, in youth a struggling artist, to suddenly find myself heir to one of the finest estates in England, I ought to have learned something. If I had but had my mother's love instead of her wealth, I think I should have learned all. Wealth, poverty, the friendship of man, the love of woman—those four sources of ex-

perience—have been mine: but the fifth I lost, even while I grasped it, to my lasting sorrow. Since the day when I parted with Earl's Dene to an English purchaser in order that I might become a brother to my father's people, my one regret has been, that my alien training had unfitted me to become a brother to my mother's people also. But I hope that England will forgive me for thinking that a more useful life, both to myself and to others, was open to me as a *propriétaire* in the department of Doubs, than as a country gentleman in the county of —, and for giving to the tenants of Earl's Dene an English banker for their landlord, instead of a French musician. For my part I am sure that England has gained by the exchange, whether France has lost by it or no. Now I trust that my life may deserve to be called eventful only so far as a strong will to make my own country the gainer also may make it so: and, with Marie to aid me, I trust not wholly to fail.

March 2d.—Two long letters to-day, both at once, from our two exiles—one from Madame l'Ambasadrice Fleurette, at St Petersburg—one from Monsieur le Capitaine Ernest, at Marseilles. That shoemaker's shop at Denethorp is already the birthplace of a great lady: I hope it may prove to be that of a great man also. Well, they seem to be happy and

unspoiled in their exile, and so make all the greater the happiness of us who stay at home among the hills.

When we had finished reading them I went out for my usual morning's walk with Loup the third: on my return,—

“Félix,” said my wife, “the Curé has just been here, wanting particularly to see you.”

Now there was nothing wonderful in this, for Father Laurent's successor, though a little afraid of me on the score of my liberal ideas, always pays me the compliment of coming to the chateau when earthly rather than heavenly aid is needed by any of his parishioners.

“Well, what is it? Nothing is the matter in the village, I hope? The good Father is rather a bird of ill omen, you know.”

“I do not know what it is. He only said that he must see you”

“What! has he not found out yet that you are the same as I? I should have thought that all the parish knew that by this time.”

“Ah, but people don't come to you about everything, you know—they come to me sometimes: and so perhaps it is now your turn to have some special confidence. And the Father seemed so excited about it, and so important, and mysterious——”

"That you think it must be something more than a bad case of rheumatism? Well, we shall see." Serious troubles and mysteries were not in the habit of finding their way into St Félix: and how, above all, could they on a day which had brought us news of our children's happiness?

"Well," I said, "we shall soon see what it is. Is Father Perrin here?"

"He said he would wait till you came in."

"Ah, then he was wise enough to know that my flight from you would not be a long one. I will see him immediately."

"Monsieur le Marquis," said the Curé, when I entered the room where he was waiting for me, "I am in a great difficulty. Yesterday evening, when I had just returned from vespers, I heard a knock at the door."

So far there was certainly no difficulty, though, from his pause, he seemed to think that I should think so. I waited for him to go on.

"I opened it, and saw a woman."

"Indeed? And who was she?"

"She was a stranger. I had never seen her before."

A stranger in St Félix! I should not have wondered if the Curé had believed himself to have discovered another in the list of modern miracles.

"And what did she want? where did she come from?"

"She had just come from Pontarlier, so she said. I asked her what was her business, and she asked if this was St-Félix-des-Rochers. Then she inquired if the Marquis de Croisville did not live here, and if he was at home."

"Well?"

"I asked her who she was and what she wanted, but she would only say that she must see you at once—as soon as you could be found: and she asked the way to the chateau."

"What was she like? How did she come?"

"On foot, I believe. She was quite tired out, and wet through. I thought she would have dropped down while she was speaking."

"On foot—what! and last night, in all that snow? Why, one would think she must have perished. Did she tell you nothing more?"

"She either would not, or was unable from fatigue. She only said that she must see you at once, and she would have gone straight to the chateau, if I and Madame Michot would have allowed her."

"This is strange indeed. But what did she look like?"

"If she had been younger—if she had been better

dressed—if she had been anywhere but here—if she had not claimed acquaintance with Monsieur le Marquis—if I knew anything about such things—if——”

“Well?”

“I should have thought her some unhappy woman who—at any rate I thought it best not to speak to Madame first. And so I thought it best—of course I don’t mean anything if she really knows Monsieur le Marquis—to let her pass the night with Madame Michot, and to see you myself the first thing in the morning.”

Well, how should he know anything about my old life? The most steady and respectable of men may not always have been so: and so, as the affair was certainly mysterious, I forgave him his suspicion.

“And her age?”

“I should say she might be forty — or perhaps five-and-thirty — or perhaps five-and-forty — or perhaps——”

“And what does Madame Michot think?”

“Only that she must be a Parisienne, from her way of speaking and her white hands. She fell sound asleep from fatigue as soon as she lay on the bed, and has lain there ever since without moving. As I said, she was quite worn out. What does Monsieur wish to be done?”

"That we will see presently. If she knows me, I have no doubt I shall remember her. Meanwhile I will go and see her at once."

But first I went back for a moment to Marie, and told her what I had heard from the Curé.

"Poor woman!" she said, "who in the world can she be, in such distress, and coming to see you here? Do not be long—and I will send down at once what she must want after last night. I will not come myself, as she might wish to see you alone."

Marie did know my old life: and, if she had not, it would have made no difference. She knew as well as I that there was nothing and could be nothing that could ever come between her and me.

So I went at once with the Curé. At his door we were met by his housekeeper, Madame Michot, who was straining her eyes for us along the road.

"Oh, Monsieur le Marquis, Monsieur le Curé," she exclaimed excitedly, "come and see!"

We all went up-stairs together.

But the Curé was not to have his mystery solved: another of the shadows out of which my life had been woven had passed away. No one on this earth will ever know the whole story of Angélique Lefort. From the day of poor Hugh Lester's death in that fatal duel—or at least from the day on which she

heard that she was a widow—she had disappeared from the sight and knowledge of us all. It is true that I had heard rumours, but they were such as I had not dared to repeat to Marie: her ignorance of her cousin's fate, though it caused her sole unhappiness, was better than a knowledge that would have overwhelmed her pure soul with sorrow and shame. And to Paris, where Marie had lived during the two years before she also became a widow, I have no reason to think that Angélique ever came. Her character was as mysterious in death as it had been in life. I knew the history of her marriage from the beginning: I, as I have said, guessed something of her after-life: and yet, in spite of all things, with a mysterious inconsistency, there lay over her dead heart a miniature of Hugh—of him whom she had deceived, despised, and destroyed. It was her last and only possession.

Had she, also, when it was too late, come to have a vision of the light? What regrets had filled her soul—what disappointments caused her to plunge recklessly into a life of despair? What thoughts had she had to keep down, what memories to destroy? By what paths of distress had she travelled to reach at length the home of him whose love she had thrown away? The instinct that led her to the home of

Marie could not have been false—but, beyond this, the answers to all these questions and to a hundred more, like the picture of him whom she had destroyed, were buried in her grave. For myself, I could not be otherwise than relieved that it was so. Marie's suspense might now be over, and she might mourn for her heroine, for her sister, without shame.

March 2d, 18—.—Yesterday I counted another birthday: with equal thankfulness for what is, and with equal hope for what is to come. As each year goes by, the clouds of my life roll more and more from memory: the sky becomes more blue and the sun more golden. And our lives—our life, I should rather say, for we have but one between us—grow stronger, too, as well as more full of happiness. I have to-day, with Marie, visited the grave of her whom we had both loved—she with all the passion of a friend, I with all that of a lover: and we both felt that we loved each other more and more. How she prayed I know not: my prayer—not only for her—was contained in two words—"Thou knowest."

I have at last set about composing the *Fantaisie* of which I dreamed years ago, and which I meant to call "*Pré-aux-Fleurs*." No one will understand it,

and I do not care whether it is understood or no. I am making it just as I please : and if the critics—as no doubt they will, should chance, which heaven forbid ! ever bring it into their hands—talk of consecutive fifths, hidden octaves, false relations, and all manner of other heresies, so much the worse for them, not for me. I am, after all, a pupil of Jean-Baptiste, not of Moretti. Let the world go on with its own false relations, and make the best of them. What is art but a part of life, and is life all harmony—all cut and dried according to rule? Can it—ought it to be so? Alas if this were all !—

“ Mais la Nature est là, qui t'invite et qui t'aime :
Plonge-toi dans son sein, qu'elle t'ouvre toujours :
Quand tout change pour toi la Nature est la même,
Et la même soleil se lève sur tes jours.”

Yes—the same nature, the same sunshine, and the same Marie !

THE END.



